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**THE VISION
OF THE FOAM**

JOHN McENERY



1/



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73 Montpelier St
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Peckham

8-8-18



THE VISION OF THE FOAM

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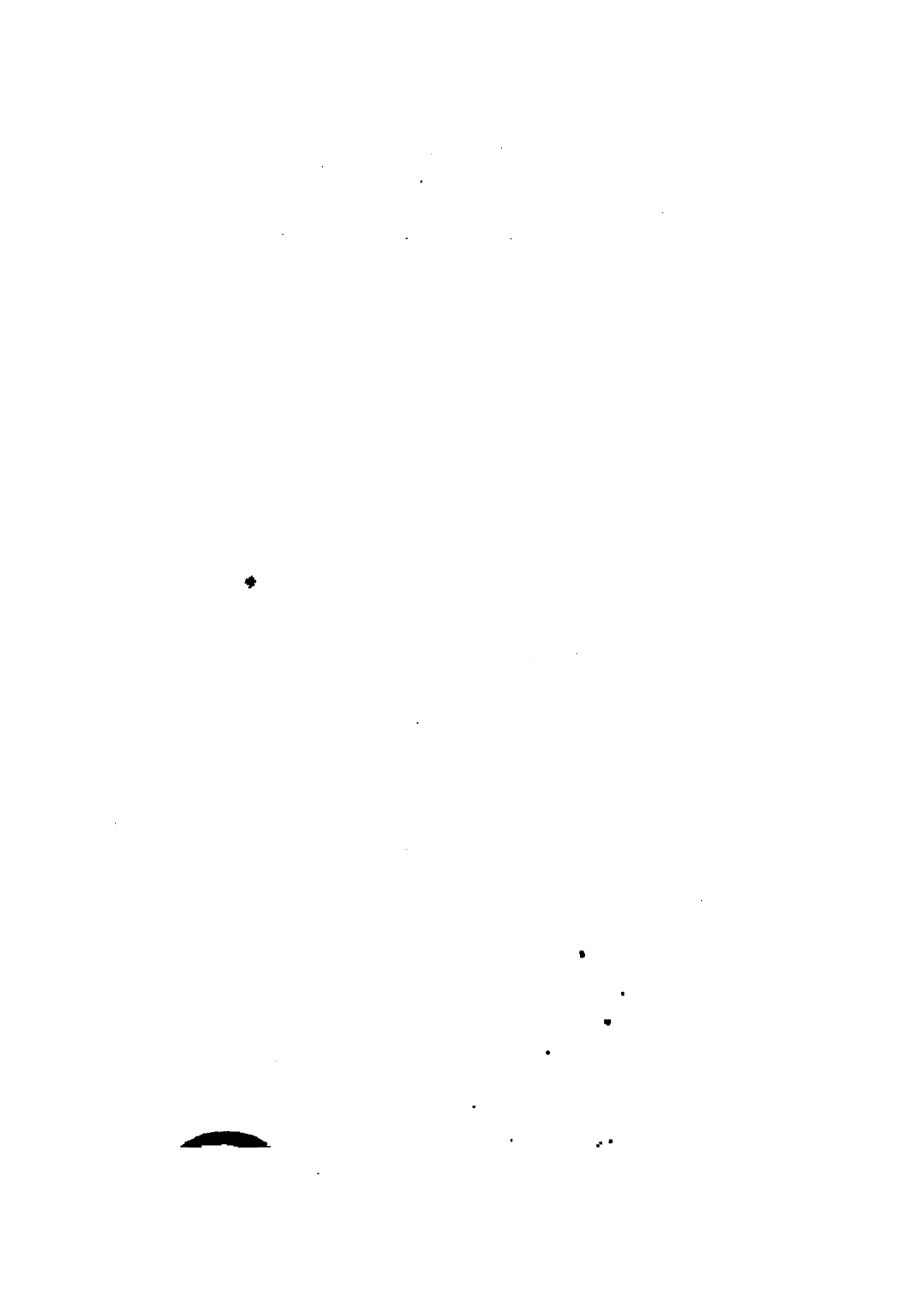
THE VISION OF THE FOAM

BY
JOHN McENERY



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THE VISION OF THE FOAM

The Vision of the Foam

CHAPTER I

The arrival one summer afternoon in the town of Bayview of a distinguished looking young woman, who entered her name in the hotel register as Edith Busch, was destined in the sequel to prove a memorable event. She came alone. Those who first saw her were struck with the incomparable charms of her person. She lit up their dull methodical lives with a dream of rare beauty and inspired ideas of mystery and romance which are often associated with women of fragile and exquisite loveliness. When, later on, gossips enjoyed the congenial pleasure of full deliberation and discussion they hinted suspiciously, without any particular reason, that such a charming creature had some secret purpose in coming alone amongst them. Prying eyes searched for a clue to her business, her mode of life, or her antecedents; but neither idle nor malignant curiosity, could obtain any particulars to account for her sudden and mysterious appearance in Bayview.

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Though not above medium height Edith Busch looked tall, with lithe and sinuous limbs of delicately graceful proportions, a shapely head, small but firmly set on her shoulders, and a handsome face from whose finely chiselled features, her blue eyes, sometimes intense in their expression, sometimes dreamy, flashed like brilliants beneath a wealth of glossy raven hair.

Bayview of the manly order went crazy with admiration of this gifted and dainty daughter of Eve, nor could the envious detractions of female relatives damp the enthusiastic masculine tributes to Edith's charms. It became the motto—Edith first; the rest nowhere. While her stylish dress of grey, trimmed with rich lace, displayed the ravishing curves and lines of a perfect figure, there hung over her whole appearance a singular charm of dignity and reserve which surrounded her as with a halo of rare distinction.

There were numerous suggestions as to whom she might be. Some people, wise in their own way, hazarded the opinion that she was an artist, though never seen with palette or brush; others thought her a lady of independent means who came to enjoy a little quiet country life from the nerve-racking fuss of the city; others still, spoke of disappointment in love; and all were wrong. She had no companion, made no acquaintance, kept religiously aloof from everybody, and shunned public attention as much as possible. This remarkable

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isolation of one so young and prepossessing heightened the mystery which her presence began to develop.

A close observation of her movements revealed nothing more romantic than a daily visit to the Strand, a mile from the town, where a crescent-shaped beach afforded a cool and pleasant retreat for visitors and natives alike. In the forenoon the place was usually deserted, but Edith preferred that time to a late hour, and was wont to spend an hour or two in solitary grandeur like a beautiful sea-nymph guarding the waters of the bay.

One morning she had sought this favourite haunt earlier than usual in the hope no doubt of enjoying the balmy atmosphere and peaceful solitude of the scene, when to her surprise she was startled by the approach of a young man with head thrust forward and his whole bearing one of tense and nervous energy. She caught a glimpse of his face. She was perched at the moment on a little mound of loose stones thrown together more by accident than design and of which broken fragments lay scattered about. "He must not pass me on this pedestal" she murmured to herself and rather hastily jumped off. As her foot touched the ground she uttered a sharp cry and sank to a sitting posture on the stone heap. The pedestrian raised his head, paused for an instant at the apparition before him, and ~~then~~ hastened forward with a look of anxious inquiry and hurriedly introduced himself.

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"My name is Mowbray—I am a doctor. I heard your cry of pain. I hope your injury is not serious. Allow me to assist you." He spoke in quick, jerky tones.

Edith, embarrassed by this eager and unexpected attention, apologised for giving the doctor needless trouble. She had been disturbed by his sudden appearance in the Strand, thinking she was alone at the time, and her cry was a start of alarm and not of pain. She uttered these apologetic words in soft sympathetic tones, a liquid gleam in her deep blue eyes, and conscious of a slight blush which artlessly enhanced her beauty. As her eyes met the doctor's fixed, earnest gaze, they both felt the electric influence of a subtle spell, a thrill of emotion which they endeavoured to conceal, but which betrayed itself in the significant silence that ensued.

Mowbray experienced the natural embarrassment of a young man of sensitive feeling who comes face to face for the first time with a young lady of surpassing charms. He imagined a world of tender feeling lit up her questioning eyes with a kindness of expression which in the vanity of early manhood he interpreted as personal interest in himself. At least such was the thought that shot across his mind. It was the work of a moment, the passing of a flash, but one swift glance of youthful glow has often spelled destiny for two who have never met before, and so it was in such fateful exchange

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that the lives of Edith Busch and George Mowbray were linked together in a tragic story.

Mowbray was a young physician who had obtained his degrees, with honours in special subjects, at a leading College, three years before his introduction to the reader. He went abroad to extend by observation and experience his knowledge of the science to which his life would be devoted, and on returning home received from an old friend of his father's, Dr. Fortescue an invitation to assist him in an extensive practice at Bayview. Mowbray consented the more readily because he knew that old Fortescue had an interesting and only daughter, Helen, and his acceptance of the position was socially and professionally a desirable opening for a young man on the threshold of his career. Youth being ever prone to indulge the pleasing romance of hope, his fancy painted the bright prospect of winning Helen's heart and hand and succeeding to her father's business. Time and chance too often shatter such glowing illusions, as Mowbray was soon to discover in the most unexpected manner.

His personality favoured the young doctor's success in life. A handsome, frank and fearless face full of intellectual vigour and a well-formed athletic frame responded actively to every impulse of life. His dark brown penetrating eyes glanced steadily at their object and those who once felt his sharp and incisive look knew they were in the presence of a man who could be either a sincere friend or a for-

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midable enemy. In his words as in his looks there was proof of the sincerity and honesty of his disposition, which gives moral strength to mental power, but the serious and decided qualities of his nature were fortunately raised above morose severity by a sense of humour which made his society always agreeable and interesting to his friends and companions. That he had chosen his true profession there could be no doubt, since he was capable of inspiring complete confidence in his judgment, and this gift with patients is not infrequently of higher value than actual skill, for it inspires the sick imagination with the hopeful belief that a cure is certain and thus helps the doctor in the battle with disease.

At the time Edith's cry arrested Mowbray's attention the latter had been immersed in the delights of anticipation. His youthful emotions were aglow with the happy thoughts that hallowed the still unseen form of Helen Fortescue. He was wrapped up in that mystic stage of joyousness when fancy is easily substituted for fact in the unbridled illusions of the mind. So it happened that when aroused by Edith's exclamation he at once concluded that this beautiful vision of the foam, which had strangely loomed up before him, could be none other than the divine Helen herself, the very thought of whom had lifted his soul into the high heaven of ecstatic pleasure. How fortunate he felt as he quickened his steps that their first meeting should give an excellent opportunity of affording

prompt and providential aid. His care and skill with ordinary cases had always proved successful, but here was an exceptional chance for all the arts of a great calling, and he summoned them to his aid as he neared the object of his deep solicitude to find himself suddenly disappointed by her explanation and apology.

The awkward pause following Edith's explanation lasted but a few seconds though it seemed minutes before Mowbray heard himself, in agitated tones, putting this delicate question ;

"May I ask if I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Helen Fortescue?"

Edith, whose eyes were diverted to escape his scrutinizing glance, on finding she was merely mistaken for another, looked at him indifferently and with a shade of regret in her voice, said :

"I am not the lady you speak of. I am a stranger in this part of the country. My name is Edith Busch."

"Pardon me," he replied with a look of confusion and disappointment. He remembered afterwards that Edith was watching him rather anxiously.

"I am a stranger also," he continued. "I have just come to Bayview to assist Dr. Fortescue in his duties. His daughter, I have heard, is a charming young lady whom I have not met and you will understand how I have made the mistake of taking you for that young lady. If she does not resemble you I shall be very sorry," he concluded, with

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a gallant compliment and a tell-tale blush.

Edith's pulse quickened as she heard this closing remark; her eyes brightened ever so slightly, and after a little hesitation she fixed her gaze full upon Mowbray's face and whispered, "I will be sorry for your sake if she is like me." There was a world of hidden meaning in those words. The Doctor stared in mute surprise and apparent confusion, but instantly recovered his self-possession. With the sharp gasp of a man who seeks a reason for some solemn statement in which warning and advice are blended, he asked eagerly:

"Why?"

Edith hesitated with an elusive look in which a strange light trembled. They glanced at each other again, and again that magic flash of the first moment of meeting sent its message from heart to heart and lit up their souls with an instant irresistible light. Both felt that something had passed between them, but their emotions were still struggling in the deep shades of silent activity.

"Why," repeated Mowbray advancing a step towards her and lowering his voice to accents of kindly persuasion, but with a strong earnestness in which his character revealed the force of persistence.

"Because," answered Edith slowly, "your romance should have a beautiful heroine."

Before Mowbray could decide whether those words were meant to mock, or to warn him that there was a secret in her life, his eye alighted upon

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the figure of a woman who had entered the Strand at the end furthest from where they stood and who wore a heavy dark veil, whether blue or black he could not at the distance discern. On seeing Edith and Mowbray together the newcomer immediately stopped and appeared irresolute, for she looked to her right and to her left as if seeking a convenient way out of observation.

"Who may this Veiled Prophetess be?" asked the Doctor, who welcomed a little diversion but did not foresee the consequences.

Edith had not observed the mysterious arrival, but excited by the Doctor's question she turned quickly round with a half frightened gesture. Suddenly her face blanched. She caught her breath and in gasps of mingled fear and appeal addressed Mowbray.

"Oh, please leave me at once. I am lost. That woman has come to watch me. Go for my sake, for your own. Don't ask me to explain. We'll meet again. Go, go, Good-bye."

Her complexion paled to a deathly hue and horror gleamed in her beautiful eyes.

The Doctor stood amazed and undecided. Was he being led by Fate into the midst of uncertainty and mystery? Edith's words and acts were not inconsistent with innocent alarm or with a nervous temperament which exaggerated trifles, but his reason cautioned him to act with prudence and withdraw as soon as possible from a situation fraught with inexplicable happenings such as he had

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just witnessed. Still, his nature, his manly spirit and personal honour as well as his scientific objection to retreat from a problem that lured by its very mystification, forbade him to refuse the hand of Fate held out then and there by a woman in distress. On the instant he made up his mind to stand by her at all hazards and never forsake or forget her, little reckoning what that resolution meant in the days to come. Acting on this decision he offered to remain and escort her safely to her hotel, but the proposal only added fresh excitement to her fears and she implored him with the fervour of one deeply touched by his kindness to leave her at once if he wanted to act the part of friend or render her any real service.

When Mowbray looked again the Veiled Woman had disappeared.

"Follow her, follow her," shouted Edith in shrill terror and let her see that we have not remained here together."

Unable to resist this heartrending request he took Edith's trembling hand in his and obtained a solemn promise that if she ever needed a friend who would readily make any sacrifice in her behalf, she should at once summon him to her side and place her life and interests in his hands. Then with a strange sense of dismal foreboding he tore himself reluctantly from her presence and followed in the track of the mysterious visitor who had disturbed their meeting.

CHAPTER II

When Mowbray had left her the troubled expression deepened on Edith's face; she felt cast into an abject state of depression; dejected, forlorn and weary of life. Away on the mountains a grey mist gathered, veiling their brightly tinted shades, while overhead thick clouds made the blue sky dreary and darkened the waters as they rolled in from the sea. Was it an ill-omen that Nature should change its mood just as her own prospects veered once more towards the black depths of despair? Full of the vital forces that health and beauty bestow, anxious to impart and enjoy happiness, anxious above all to forget the life from which she had fled, the advent of this dark veiled figure had plunged her afresh into a whirl of hopeless misery. Bereft of the presence and friendship of the first man whose personality appealed to the tenderest instincts of her nature, a sense of utter loneliness enveloped her as the mist enveloped the mountain and left her thoughts groping at the mercy of a nameless fear.

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The anguish of a riven soul found relief in tears, the tears that tell of sadness and regret, of sorrow and disappointment, of hope baffled by an adverse fate. Through the deep gloom of distress a feeling of gratitude stole over her heart at the generous ardour of the man who had pledged himself without reserve to one unknown, to watch over and protect her from every danger. This chivalrous resolve remained a consolation which she prized like a gem of the rarest value. But should she avail of his offer or relieve him from the obligation before he became embroiled in the perils that beset her path?

One false step had placed her in the power of an unscrupulous man to whom she was bound by a written declaration of momentous import in which under her own hand she acknowledged a terrible secret. The terror of that secret had gnawed through her brain with such unceasing force that now with George Mowbray's promise ringing in her ears she felt the hot blush of a guilt so appalling that she prayed Heaven to leave her reason untouched. Poor child! She had allowed undue excitement to master her emotions, but when calm returned the faint sweet hope obtruded itself that if she trusted to his help, Mowbray might save her from ruin.

The gentle ripple of the waters, as the tide slowly advanced, seemed to whisper sympathy from the far-away mysterious deep. She was a child

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of the sea. Her father had been a sailor, who went down with his ship and her mother was lost in the storm beside her gallant husband. That tragedy had spared an old man, a boy and a girl, the latter an infant ten months. The old man loved the children, particularly the bright-eyed, chubby-faced little mite who was the only daughter of his bosom friend, the Captain, and having some money saved after an adventurous career in the Persian Gulf, had her educated when she grew up, with other children beyond her in station, for the old man had ambitions, but surpassed by Edith in beauty and intelligence. The death of the old tar was a great blow to Edith's future. It involved the necessity of seeking employment and she believed herself fortunate in securing a position in the same establishment in which the boy who had been saved with her from the wreck was engaged in a responsible and confidential capacity. That seemed a long time ago as the events fitted through her memory, but their remembrance came back now with definite force as she stood by the weird monotonous waters out on those unfathomable depths lay the bones of her parents awaiting the trumpet sound that will summon mankind to witness the justice of God.

Suddenly her thoughts reverted to her present adventure. Mowbray had shown great reluctance to leave her alone, his manner was touchingly considerate and his kindness impressed her sensibly,

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deeply. As a natural result she passed to the hope that she might see him soon again, look into his manly face and read there—the idea struck her with something like dismay but she could not resist it—the thought that he was free to speak and claim her if he chose. She started as the last possibility presented itself with prophetic perception. Suppose that time came to pass would it be right on her part to encourage him or more praiseworthy and straightforward to fly from the temptation held out by such a happy prospect. Her woman's instinct had discovered a secret which a man's face has no power to conceal from a woman interested in his inmost feelings.

She felt the power placed within her grasp, but she felt also how selfish would be her conduct if by serving herself she brought trouble and sorrow upon a friend; and torn by conflicting emotions, unable to make up her mind, she wished George Mowbray had not thus come into her life. The pleasure of the sensation overpowered the desire to forget. Try as she would, this strong, handsome self-avowed protector, could not be kept out and the struggle in its fretful and pleasing phases occupied her thoughts and aroused fear and hope alternately.

Meanwhile the doctor had set off in a vigorous manner to follow the trail of the Veiled Woman. There was something in the task which jarred on his finer feelings but his distaste died away when he remembered the object was merely to show him-

self and not to act as spy upon her movements. He passed quickly down a short narrow road fringed with grass-grown banks of richly shaded green, to the main highway, expecting at the turn to come within sight of the stranger, but when he reached that point she was nowhere visible. This fact surprised and further mystified him. Where could she have disappeared? The wide public road ran straight for a considerable distance and unless she had sped on wings or sank into the earth, she could not have escaped during the time that elapsed between her disappearance from the Strand and his starting in pursuit. There were places of hiding on the way, a thick hedgerow at one side and deserted half-ruined farmyard buildings on the other, but as she was not a criminal flying from arrest why should she seek concealment? Puzzled by failure, he decided to walk on rapidly in the belief that perhaps he had not reckoned the time accurately and that the woman might have covered more ground than he thought possible in her anxiety to avoid discovery. He looked without finding them for marks of her footprints, so that his deductive faculty received no assistance from such convenient clues, and though he kept a sharp look out in every direction between the Strand and the suburbs of the town he failed to perform the task on which he had set out.

Suddenly the idea occurred that after all the Veiled Woman might be a criminal, with desperate intentions upon the life of Edith Busch, and that

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seeing him leave Edith alone had hidden behind the hedge or in the farmyard and when he had passed returned to the Strand and carried out her evil design. As this horrifying thought took root in the doctor's mind his blood ran cold with fear lest some mishap had befallen the beautiful woman whom he had left in a terrified state and utterly unprotected, behind him. He cursed the folly of his action in being so easily persuaded to leave her alone under such strange circumstances. He turned back at once and with rapid strides, running portion of the way, quickly regained the entrance to the narrow lane which connected the main road with the beach. Would he be in time was the question continually repeating itself in response to his growing fears? With grave uncertainty dogging his steps he entered the Strand in a breathless state, to find to his intense dismay that Edith was missing. This new and alarming surprise overshadowed every other incident. He had left Edith in a prostrate condition, her mind full of terror and her body weakened with nervous fear, and if attacked she might have rushed into the sea to escape. Mowbray became well-nigh distracted as this reflection flashed through his mind. To ease his heartrending doubts he looked here and there for evidence of a struggle, but though footprints were visible they were well-defined and presented nothing unusual in their appearance. The sea was calm, the water clear. He peered into its depths but could

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see nothing to justify the assumption that Edith had either sought that means of escape from misery or had been hurled there by a vengeful assailant.

The suggestion that Edith might have fallen victim to a criminal design took strong hold of the doctor. He regretted having obeyed her request to follow the Veiled Woman, but had he known that danger lurked so near he would at the risk of disfavour have compelled Edith to accept his protection. If however these fears were groundless what had happened during his absence? With this strange development in a short time the whole mystery had taken a deeper turn, passing beyond his power to solve, yet interesting and attracting him on account of the fascinating woman concerned, who had won his sympathy and whose fate seemed to be involved in its solution.

Uncertainty had helped to fasten Edith's charms upon the doctor's imagination. He had never known any woman whom he could compare with her for transcendent personal gifts. The thought of her dainty fragile form, the charm of her beautiful eyes, her tender magnetic sympathy, sent the blood coursing through his veins with a restless, entrancing fever. Her enigmatical confession—"For your sake I hope she is not like me"—returned to him again and again insistently. What could those words have meant? They conveyed some secret meaning other than a mere expression of sentiment in his favour. While the spell of her fascination was upon his mind

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and while powerless to resist it, a solemn voice from within of prudence and of fate cried out "Beware of the future, beware of the unseen." The voice however called in vain. Beauty and mystery, the movers of mighty events, were allied in their allurements; mystery in this instance giving the touch of danger that makes love, like war, attractive to the human mind.

Edith's look and voice, the touch of her trembling hand, her tears, her distress and danger filled the doctor's soul with a feeling he had never entertained for any other woman. She had changed the current of his life. He thought no more of Helen Fortescue. It was short work, a moment had sufficed, but the potent influence of that moment had left a mark that Time could not efface. For good or ill, though he dare not acknowledge the fact even to himself, Edith had become mistress of his future, the arbiter of his destiny. Did he wish for such bondage? Let his thoughts speak? At that moment his sole desire, his hope, his passion, was to meet and speak to her once more, to feel the soothing effect of her magic presence, to watch the light and shade of changing thought and colour flash upon her lovely face and to feel that some day he might claim the position and right to protect her through life.

Finding himself drifting fast with the flowing tide of feeling the doctor tried to check his thoughts, but they washed over every barrier of mental reservation, and swept him on towards the point

where man reveals himself as the helpless sport of Cupid. Up to this he had only heard of love at first sight. Now he knew what it was, he felt its force, its power, and when that truth struck him he surrendered without a struggle to the pleasures and hopes of a joyful bondage.

"Love," he murmured, as he tried to interpret the new-born sentiment, "is the elixir of life. That spark from Edith's eye vibrates through my frame like celestial fire. It fills my heart and brain with an extraordinary feeling of life and exhilaration, and a delightful sense of real happiness. Philosophers of old sought for the secret of perpetual youth among the mystics of the East, but buried drugs and magic jargon have no power over man. Such power rests in the light that shines from woman's eyes, the light that reveals the soul and penetrating to the dark corners of the heart gilds the glory of morning youth and hope."

In many an hour of after life Edith's first look stole out from the caves of memory and brightened the sad and murmuring sea ere the bark of Mowbray's life found rest in its lonely haven.

Failing to discover Edith anywhere on the Strand or near it, he hastened back to Bayview filled with misgivings for her safety. Had he time at his disposal he would have continued a vigorous search but he was due to visit Dr. Fortescue and that appointment could not be overlooked or delayed.

CHAPTER III

Mowbray's perspective had undergone a rapid change. He scarcely thought of Helen Fortescue; he forgot that such a girl lived. Edith Busch, the mystery that shrouded her life, her beauty, the feelings that that beauty stirred into tumultuous disorder, had complete possession of his mind. He saw her image in everything; her form appealed to his imagination from every vantage point of memory; her smallest movement, the glance of her eye, the velvet touch of her white hand, her distress, were everywhere vividly before his mind's eye. His preparations for visiting Dr. Fortescue's were painful, the mere prosaic effort of a dull duty. There was no romance now associated with seeing Helen; the romance was ruined by his adventure at the Strand.

Yet circumstances demanded that gratitude to the man who had invited him to Bayview should have first place in his thoughts for the time, and by this decision the visit became pleasant for all concerned. Her father's new assistant found

Helen a self-possessed, superior young lady with decided attractions and most agreeable manner. Serious and vivacious by turns but never uninteresting, her conversation showed a clear, well-informed mind, full of information, and capable of conveying it in pleasing and delightful speech. Her personal attributes were uncommon. Beneath large tresses of auburn hair neatly coiled over a high forehead, her handsome hazel eyes, deep-set but bright and animated, lit up a lily-like complexion and gave strength and expression to her clear regular features. Her face impressed Mowbray as that of a young lady of firm will and resolution. But he was instantly conscious of the vast difference between her's and Edith's type of loveliness, for the most favourable comparison left Edith without a rival, a queen by the right of the lavish perfection with which Nature had bestowed its gifts.

By degrees the doctor discovered that Helen had special claims to admiration. Her ideas breathed sincerity and benevolence; her opinions were those of an unselfish, self-sacrificing woman. She showed a generous, charitable character when speaking of others and her ideal of womanhood appeared to be a development of moral and domestic qualities towards perfection and happiness at home. The smart woman and dull woman were to her mind equally abominable. Woman, she believed, was intended to supply in man's life the sweet soothing music which mellows the harsh strains

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of strenuous clamour and constant strife. If she cannot pull the sting from sorrow and put fresh hope into the heart bowed down by care, she fails as man's friend in need.

Those views of a young woman would have stamped her as old-fashioned among the modern mermaids, half-woman half-man, who have jumped out of the bushes of a diseased social system and like disturbed hares can never get back to the form of contentment and pleasure at home; but the doctor could see that Helen's opinions were the result of innate modesty and true appreciation of her sex, directed and controlled by a cultivated intellect, and he felt that if education were devoted to the expansion of the mind and natural dispositions of women instead of pandering to their vanities, crazes and follies, the national character would regain the prestige of the days when women were content to rock the cradle and nurse to health and strength the sons who were to make and hold an Empire.

During the visit Mowbray's regard for Helen ripened into esteem. There was nothing narrow-minded or intolerant in her disposition. Her heart was as open as her smile was winsome; her words earnest, her nature warm, confident and truthful. Had he not seen Edith and been submerged in the vortex of her irresistible charms he might have yearned to do homage at Helen's shrine.

If Dr. Fortescue entertained the hope that Helen would marry Mowbray he was doomed

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to disappointment. Paternal solicitude is one thing but a daughter's inclinations and sentiments are quite another and not always cut in the same groove. It happened that Helen had already made her choice and given her heart to Rial Greton, the young master of Bayview House.

Greton was a peculiar young man, half dandy, half rustic in his dress, with an unmistakable air of good breeding, of refined and delicate features, but childish, often ridiculous, in his language and actions and always showing by meek deference to the opinions of others a painful lack of confidence in himself. Nevertheless he was proud to haughtiness because of his connection with the great family of the Trevors from whom his mother had sprung. She married Henry Greton for wealth and the influence that wealth commands, but that was her only transgression against the laws of exclusiveness, a transgression for which she determined to atone by providing that no taint of the common spirit of the people should touch the sacred person of her only son. She devoted much time to the task of fitting him for life as the worthy descendant of his maternal ancestors, putting ideas and prejudices into his youthful mind which frightened a shrewd practical father and induced him to protest, though vainly, against her foolish conduct. The result of his mother's whims and pride produced an opposite effect to that which she desired. Constantly thrown

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into her society, Rial's gregarious instincts imbibed the mannerisms of his mother and he grew up a spoiled child, physically and mentally. Old Greton's last days were darkened by the obscurity that overhung the faculties of his child. When Rial's mother died some years later she gave him in charge to a tutor, Louis Gabriel, whom she had engaged specially, and to whom she left strict injunctions to preserve Rial from the vices and follies of the world.

Such was Rial Greton, the victim of a vain mother's misplaced affection, a silly young man, a man incapable of appreciating his real responsibility as the heir of considerable wealth.

And for this young fellow, mentally starved and stunted, Helen Fortescue of all girls in the town entertained feelings of affection. It surprised people to think that a young woman of Helen's intelligence should form an attachment and bestow her esteem upon one wanting in qualities that girls most admire, but those who passed unfavourable judgment were unaware that she was influenced by a spirit of self-sacrifice and a worthy desire to help and serve Rial rather than gratify any selfish ambition of her own. From youth Rial had been her friend, she had seen him a rosy-faced laughing boy beside his stately mother, she had girlish dreams of becoming his bride and these recollections working through a sensitive nature, sowed the seeds of affection which grew with advancing years until

her chief aim in life became the desire to guide his weak footsteps and lead him firmly but gently away from the pitfalls that surrounded him at every turn. She risked the charge of folly in a choice directed by a noble motive and was prepared to abide the consequences of her own free act. Rial's unstable and restless conduct had often caused Helen keen alarm but altogether she could not complain of his devotion since they began to understand life in its happiest phase. They had kept from Dr. Fortescue the knowledge of their relations and he never suspected that Rial was other than an intimate friend of Helen's.

The afternoon that found Mowbray visiting the Fortescues brought Rial in the same direction to speak the oft-repeated words of endearment in Helen's ears, but just as he reached the head of the main street, the radiant form of Edith Busch crossed his path. It was a fateful encounter. Fortunately the doctor's fears about her safety were all fanciful. The Veiled Woman had disappeared from her ken as well as from Mowbray's and Edith having overcome her fears returned leisurely to the town by a longer route than she usually followed.

Rial saw her now for the first time like an embodied Spirit of Enchantment stepping out of her fairy palace to bewitch all mortal beholders. She enchained him to the spot where he stood as in a dream, gazing with eyes of wonder and delight,

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of hope and distraction. When he recovered the sense of motion, his first impulse was to follow and ascertain her name but as this appeared to savour of ill-bred curiosity he curbed the inclination and kept on his course at a much slower pace. How plain and uninteresting Helen had suddenly become. She had been his ideal, the girl whom he had promised to cherish and love through life, the friend of his youth, his companion, adviser, and prospective bride, and now she was dethroned, a broken idol, destroyed by the fleeting glance of another unknown woman.

He commenced to build castles in the air, in the airy fashion of the irresponsible. If this stranger were still free, if she could marry him he had fortune and happiness to offer. He had the cunning associated with the half-fool of knowing that he was the most eligible young man in Bayview. If this charming goddess, who might be Bayview's Queen, consented to become his wife he would willingly be her slave. Then he paused in this wild, senseless reverie. Helen's home rose before him like an accusing form and a shade of pain shot across his sicklied features. Had he forgotten his obligations, his words, his promises, and turned traitor to all his declarations of affection? Should he for a mere look sever the ties that bound him to Helen Fortescue? He was a gentleman and well-bred, bound by his promise as much as by his oath. How could he break away and ever

afterwards feel that he was a man of faith and honour?

Assailed by doubt, and tormented by the fear that Helen would at once discover his coolness, for he felt he could no longer meet her with his accustomed warmth and cordiality, he approached reluctantly the door. The ring of the bell sounded like a shriek within the house and grated horribly on his overstrung nerves. As the door opened, his heart stopped, his eyes swam in a mist and the blood left his face. In thought he had betrayed Helen. Must he adopt the shabby device of hypocrisy to hide his shame and guilt? As a gentleman he felt like one committing a low crime but he had no strength of mind to act otherwise and he moved in a dazed manner into the presence of the old doctor, who introduced him to Mowbray while Helen with a frightened look rushed towards him. "You must be ill," she said with real concern.

Rial stammered an excuse, and laughed in his foolish vacuous style when in difficulty.

"Really, Helen, I'm quite well. Don't worry about me. I feel a little heady—nothing more."

"Heady," thought Mowbray. "Want of heady I should think."

"You have two doctors here and one must attend you, I insist."

Mowbray offered to comply with her request and asked Rial to accompany him to the surgery

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where he might conduct a thorough examination.

When they were alone the vacuous smile broke out again on Rial's changed countenance.

"It is too bad to give this trouble," he said, "I agreed to come with you solely because it pleased Helen and will ease her anxiety. God forgive me. I am a wretched man, my health is all right but I suffer in another way. Yesterday I loved Helen. To-day my love is dead, blasted by an event that I dare not explain to her."

The doctor thought of his own experience of the morning and sympathised with Rial, whose character he had learned something about from old Fortescue.


"It may be a passing fancy," urged Mowbray. "Helen is an excellent girl and you should be happy if you have won her affection. Put the thought of other women out of your head. You can only marry one."

Rial shook his head and gave a low hoarse moan of despair.

"Perhaps you exaggerate your feelings." Mowbray was sympathetic because he saw Rial so deeply affected.

"No, no," he shouted as he jumped up and paced the floor with uneasy steps. "Her face haunts me."

"It is another woman then," said the doctor with a slight start, not sure till then of the cause of Rial's trouble.



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"Yes, I saw her just now for the first time and I can never forget her. I don't know who she is. She must be a stranger."

The suspicion at once crossed the doctor's mind that he referred to Edith Busch.

"I had no idea," said Rial, "that a woman's appearance could so affect any man. I am anxious to be that woman's slave, to follow her anywhere and never wish to see anybody else."

The doctor felt that only Edith Busch could make such an impression. She must be safe he thought after the morning's adventure and the information disposed of his doubts and fears and made him happy without the least tinge of jealousy of Rial's avowal.

"She is a divine creature," went on Rial. Such grace, such loveliness, such glorious eyes and beautiful features I never before beheld."

"There may be danger in such beauty," suggested Mowbray.

A silence fell upon both men. Each was busy with his own particular thoughts and neither seemed desirous of further conversation. At length Rial moved towards the door and they returned to Helen. She noticed the pre-occupied looks upon their faces. Mowbray roused himself with an effort and meeting Helen's glance saw doubt and inquiry there. It plainly expressed the desire for information which the doctor could not give and Rial was anxious to avoid. A forced discus-

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sion on indifferent topics failed to arouse any life in the little group and it was therefore a relief when Rial on the plea of illness cut short his visit.

Helen felt lonely when they were gone. A shadow had come over her life. Rial never acted in such a strange uninterested manner before and her sharp woman's instinct detected a serious change in his demeanour. It cost her a night of aching wakefulness but the first outburst is the worst with a woman of her mould and she resolved to be patient.

Greton was glad to escape from Helen's distrustful eyes in which he saw himself arraigned. He parted with Mowbray at the corner where Edith Busch had passed a short time before and as they went in different directions they had little thought of the strange occurrence towards which they were drifting.

CHAPTER IV

Next morning Mowbray was endeavouring to account for the events of the previous day when his landlady entered the room and handed him a letter marked private and confidential, which he opened and read as follows:—

DEAR DOCTOR,

Your kind offer of protection yesterday has placed me under a deep obligation which I am anxious to repay. Since I saw you at the Strand, an arrangement has been made to give a ball at Bayview House to which we are both to be invited. I cannot refuse and there may be danger in your accepting the invitation, but if you decide to take the risk, on no account ask me to dance or show the least interest whatever in my presence. There will be keen eyes watching our movements and we must be on guard. In return for your promise of protection I send this warning as .

Your sincere friend,

EDITH BUSCH.

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The doctor read this startling epistle several times. The caligraphy interested him, inasmuch as several words were written in a firm hand, but at points the writer appeared to waver, probably from a sudden attack of nervousness, and then the letters ran cramped and badly formed. She must have felt alarmed for his safety when she described her letter as a warning, but while gratified with the anxiety displayed on her part he decided that if danger threatened it would be on account of his association with her and he therefore made up his mind at once to attend the ball. The act of writing the letter, gave proof of deeper feeling than mere friendship. It plainly indicated that danger threatened because somebody else wanted to keep them apart. Naturally his attentions if encouraged by Edith might arouse jealousy and hatred but to whom did the keen eyes belong that would be watching their movements? If she referred to Rial Greton, the doctor refused to reckon him a serious rival and sought an answer to the question in the incident connected with the Veiled Woman and Edith's terror at her appearance. The words in the letter "I cannot refuse," puzzled the Doctor considerably, because their only meaning could be that she was in the power of another and therefore not a free agent in her actions.

According to the arrangement with Dr. Fortescue, Mowbray had to visit the outside patients, and as

time for work had arrived he carefully locked up Edith's letter and sallied forth to discharge his professional duties. His last call that morning brought him to the vicinity of Bayview House. For a time he debated within himself whether he should visit Rial Greton or await another opportunity but curiosity had become excited by personal interest, and finding a ready excuse in the illness of Rial, he entered the grounds and walked briskly towards the house.

The building could not be seen from the public road at the town side but on following the gravel-path which wound in circular fashion round the demesne, the broken roof suddenly peeped out from a wooded bower. Further on over a gentle slope the house came full into view overlooking the bay, its situation being well-chosen for picturesque effect. Two strongly-built, massive towers at either side of the façade gave a feudal if not grim aspect to a modern structure, preserved the strength of its ancient character, and adorned an exterior which without their aid would have little claim to architectural pretension. Away through the trees the visitor caught silvery glimpses of the sea, and through an open space the mountain loomed up in the distance like a giant keeping guard against the winds. The place and scene looked beautiful in its quiet sylvan charm and breathed a spirit of rest and calm and sweet contentment.

A.

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These soothing impressions were quickly dispelled by an unexpected experience. In answer to Mowbray's knock the door was opened by a tall gaunt man of cadaverous countenance, wearing a long black cloak like a monk's, whose contrasts of feature and of dress made him hideous to contemplate. The Council of Three would have promoted such a libel on humanity to the highest gift in their service for his look alone. The doctor involuntarily stepped back as if a ghost had appeared but quickly regained his composure and made known his purpose.

"You cannot see him at present," replied the medieval janitor in harsh and unsympathetic tones. "We want no strangers here," he added gruffly.

Fiercely indignant at such rude behaviour Mowbray raised his voice and said loudly:

"I am a doctor. I attended Mr. Greton last evening and I demand to see him now. Let me pass."

Thus boldly and peremptorily challenged the gaunt individual made a sullen excuse and having opened the door to admit the doctor, closed it with a fierce bang and left Mowbray standing in a large bare hall in a state of indignation at such an extraordinary reception. Before the doctor's eyes had become accustomed to the darkness Torquemada had disappeared. For some seconds there was no sound, no movement; the stillness of the tomb brooded over the place. Mowbray

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had an idea that the ghost had stolen silently away to acquaint his master, but how had he gone? All the doors were locked like the cells in prison corridors and there was no apparent way of passing from one part of the house to another that he could perceive. What a house he thought for a ball? It gave him a chilly, creepy feeling to enter there in the broad light of a summer day. How should he feel at night in a place walled in and dedicated to secrecy and stealth? After an interval of gloomy reflection, a door creaked in a distant landing visible from the spot where the doctor stood and the black-robed warder beckoned him to advance. Filled with an uncomfortable sense of loneliness the doctor found relief in the sound made by his footsteps as he went rapidly forward to end the suspense of this weird form of introduction. The dismal figure again vanished to reappear further on where two doors stood close to each other. He motioned to one on which he knocked twice and suddenly disappeared through the other. If the doctor had been led into some mystic cave where sacred rites were jealously guarded from the prying eyes of ordinary mortals, there could scarcely have been more awe-inspiring and mysterious care about his induction, and yet his judgment clung to the belief that this mid-day seance had been artfully arranged to give him a false impression of the house and its inmates. He was glad however

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when he reached the door indicated and a voice called faintly:

"Come in, doctor, come in."

The doctor obeyed and found himself in a large well-ventilated bedroom, richly furnished and inviting repose. Rial, looking haggard and feverish, allowed the doctor to speak first.

"You have not slept much since I last saw you," said Mowbray, with a slight ring of anxiety in his words. "If you are not careful," he continued, "you may become seriously ill."

"I am frightfully disturbed," explained Rial in an agitated manner. "The thought of deceiving Helen is killing me but I must deceive her for I have no strength to resist the crime. I am body and soul in the power of the other woman."

This pitiable confession of a weak and fickle mind merited contempt, but Mowbray had not come to discuss the ethics of a man's conduct and knew that if Rial referred to Edith Busch, he was harbouring an absurd illusion and paving the way to a bitter and painful disappointment. The doctor advised him earnestly to chase the shadow from his brain and keep his thoughts centred on Helen's virtues and admirable devotion. She had been sincere and true to him, she had braved everything for his love, and deserved his fidelity and trust in return. In eloquent language Mowbray painted the folly of deceiving a woman of Helen's rare attributes; and the strong self-

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reliant tone of his manner and voice communicated its influence to Rial's mind and helped him in the resolution that he should remain faithful to his first love.

"A good resolution makes a man feel better, doctor. Doesn't it?"

"Yes. It is the next best thing to a good act."

Rial looked much calmer and better than when the doctor arrived and now Mowbray thought well, in view of Edith's letter, to learn something of the other people in the house.

"I have no wish to complain during my first visit," began Mowbray, "but I must tell you the man who admitted me acted in a very rude manner."

"That is my tutor, Louis Gabriel," explained Rial. "He has an abhorrence of strangers and is always uncivil to them. At first his face frightened me, too, but I have learned to like him. He was specially selected by my mother for his austere manner and ascetic habits, to educate me as she wished I should be trained, and on her death-bed she committed me to his charge and extracted the promise that I would take no serious step in life without his approval and consent. She placed him in the position of a father and he treats me with every kindness and consideration. He insists on perfect silence through the house and at once dismisses any servant who infringes this rule. He is very

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religious, spends the greater portion of the day in prayer and pious reading and finds recreation in a laboratory in the upper storey where he carries on experiments alone. He never under any pretext whatever allows another person to enter there. It would irritate him exceedingly if he knew I had spoken in this way and you will regard my words in strict confidence. He is a man I would not like to turn into an enemy."

The doctor, deeply interested in this description, had no doubt Rial spoke as he believed, but thought the statement did not reveal Gabriel's true character. However he kept this opinion to himself and promised to respect Rial's confidence,

"He sometimes terrifies me," went on Rial. "by rushing into my room and telling me he has been speaking to my mother. On every occasion this occurs she sends the same message that she is watching carefully over my conduct and expects I will act as she taught me during her life."

"To what particular matter does the advice refer?"

"Marriage, always."

"There is deep purpose in Gabriel's game," thought the doctor, who saw how easily Rial would fall a victim to influence of this kind.

"Do you believe your mother speaks to him as he describes?" asked the doctor aloud.

"I do," said Rial.

This emphatic answer gave clear evidence of

the ascendancy obtained by doubtful but effective means over the will of Rial Greton. Its power could only be broken by separation and with that object Mowbray remarked :

‘ Helen is a good girl and if you take my advice you will marry immediately.’

The effect of these words was rather unexpected and brought out in strong relief the weak and half imbecile character of Rial.

“ Oh, doctor, you shock me, you really shock me. You should not speak of Helen as a good girl. No gentleman could allow his wife to be called a girl. My mother always said my wife should be a perfect lady. She never allowed the word girl to be mentioned except in speaking of the lower class. Be careful doctor, please, or you shall fret me and I feel bad enough already.”

This silly display of empty snobbery excited the doctor's disgust but it shed a light on Rial's character, which enabled Mowbray to diagnose at once the category to which he belonged in the human pharmacopœia. He was a polite, well-bred idiot, spoiled by a mother's vain punctilio, weak, ignorant, and proud. A man easy to dupe by pretence of friendship, a coxcomb without cunning, a useless weakling with a giggling smile, to whom a little brains would have been of greater benefit than all the wealth his father had bequeathed. It annoyed Mowbray to meet such a vapid specimen of the human species,

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but it displeased him much more to find Rial so completely in the power of a crafty and unscrupulous jailer as he believed Gabriel to be.

"The sooner you get the perfect lady the better," suggested the doctor with sarcastic emphasis.

"She is here already," returned Rial, "but not as my wife."

"Here," ejaculated Mowbray in surprise.

"Yes," said Rial. "Mrs. Charlotte Mason, a real lady, is now in charge of this house. She came here on the recommendation of Lord Hendley and is a very interesting and cheerful person. You will meet her the night of the ball. Of course you will come. You must promise me. I want all the clever people here and you are one of them. I won't take any excuse."

Mowbray thought a moment as Edith's letter recurred to his mind, but instantly banished all hesitation as he said :

"It will give me much pleasure."

These words were accompanied by what sounded like a low mocking chuckle not far off and distinct enough to show that a third person had been listening to their conversation.

CHAPTER V

A remarkable transformation had taken place in Bayview House between the day of Mowbray's visit and the night which was to celebrate a great change in its social history. Since Rial's birth there had been no festive gathering within its walls and the house became associated in the public mind with loneliness and gloom, so much so, that if any reason were whispered for calling it haunted credence would readily attach to the statement. Under Mrs. Mason's energetic superintendence the forbidding aspect of the interior gave way to a bright, cheerful appearance; flowers and plants were deftly and artistically arranged and an air of homely ease and luxury imparted to the whole interior. When the guests assembled it surprised many to find the floral decorations perfect and the perfume of beautiful flowers stealing upon and filling their senses with delight.

This unusual break in the stillness of the Greton household found its young master unprepared for the duties of the occasion and unfitted to dis-

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charge with becoming propriety the responsibilities of a competent host. Mrs. Mason took pains to school him in correct form and demeanour but such little effect had her instructions that Rial at the reception of his guests kept his face averted, particularly from the ladies, and giggled and blushed like a school-girl, shading his eyes with his hand at one moment and stealing a look here and there the next, as if hunted down and threatened with some dire calamity. These imbecile antics were however soon forgotten in the whirl of gaiety and enjoyment.

A hush fell upon this scene of life and colour when the queenly form of Edith Busch in a royal dress of cream and salmon pink entered the ball-room. All eyes were fastened upon the ethereal perfections of her figure, the smooth wondrous marble glow of her complexion, and the vivacious blue of her lustrous eyes. Her raven hair sparkled in the light and contrasted the charming whiteness of her neck and arms.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed several voices in the candour of honest admiration. All the arts and tricks of suppression cannot sometimes prevent the expression of truth. And beautiful she undoubtedly was beyond the power of adequate description.

No sooner had Rial caught sight of her stately presence than he forgot everything but the fact that she was the woman of whom he had raved

almost incessantly night and day since the memorable evening he first saw her in Bayview. He did not pause to think how she had come to his house. Mrs. Mason or Gabriel had probably sent the invitation. All he was concerned with at the moment was that this sublime creature had become his guest, was under his own roof, and trembling in the delight and excitement of such good fortune, he moved with nervous haste to place himself and all that he had at her disposal. She accepted his company with every outward mark of favour, beamed ravishing smiles upon his rubicund face and gave every encouragement to his attentions. In fact so quickly did their intimacy develop that ere the night had far advanced gossip had settled a matrimonial arrangement between the beautiful stranger and her host.

The extraordinary impression made by Edith's entrance had scarcely faded when the assembly stood aghast at the elongated, scowling form of Louis Gabriel, who had glided noiselessly into their midst. Those nearest gave low shrieks and fell away in terror, and nervous, shrinking faces peeped from the distance at an apparition calculated to unnerve then all. He frowned upon the scene like an indignant seer who had come to curse their frivolity, and casting a searching look at Edith, a look of menace and authority, disappeared in the uncanny fashion of an evil spirit. A frightened silence ensued, only broken when Mrs.

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Mason explained that this dramatic display was the protest of a wise and pious man against her social amenities and they were not to look upon the matter other than as a mere personal freak of the tutor's. This explanation restored the humour and added to the gaiety of the guests with whom Mrs. Mason became a most popular hostess.

Mowbray watched every detail with keen and anxious eyes. It was not the scene nor the pleasure that held his attention; he was captivated by the mystery behind the revel and the attitude of the principal actors in this drama of real life.

Edith's meaning glance on her arrival cautioned him to obey her warning and though the fire in his veins kindled to fever heat at sight of her face and form, and though he felt courage sufficient to brave a thousand dangers in her behalf, he resolved to be prudent and to follow carefully the advice contained in her letter. It meant a severe strain upon his will and manhood to appear indifferent to the presence of his beautiful friend, the fairest creature he had ever seen, an angel of loveliness in this place of pleasure, who longed perhaps to explain the mystery of the beach and tell him a tale that would gladden his heart and raise his hopes to the happiest heights man can reach in a woman's estimation, but he should obey her advice or risk not her displeasure alone but the danger of the unseen enemy against whom she had warned him.

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Sorrow lay like a haunting spectre upon one sad face in that gay assembly. It belonged to Helen Fortescue. She noticed Rial's complete neglect of herself and his absorbing regard for Edith and a sense of pain and outrage crushed her heart. To her face the man who had promised a hundred times to be faithful until death, had broken and trampled upon his words and without shame or remorse triumphed in his deception. Her pride forbade her to leave though there were whispers of pity ringing in her ears from those who took delight in tormenting a jilted sister. Under pretence of sympathy they probed the wound with the most poisoned instruments in their possession—lying tongues. She bore all, she never winced, she clenched her small resolute hands in the grip of a martyr's determination and tightened her lips with the firm purpose of seeing the hideous night through in all its mockery and bitterness. Sometimes the task appeared too great, the trial too heavy for a young and tender soul, but only through death has victory often come, and as she thought of this she struggled against the deceit and hypocrisy of which she was the innocent victim and hoped some day to look back with composure to the trying ordeal she had now to endure for one who had proved himself unworthy of her love.

She had one real friend in the giddy and heedless throng. Bound by gratitude to her father, George

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Mowbray looked upon himself in the position of a brother to Helen. Her state of distress had not escaped his observation and appealed to every manly instinct of his nature. If Rial were an ordinary person of sound reason the contempt and disgust of the doctor would have found vigorous expression on the spot but against the well-bred idiot a robust remedy is poor satisfaction. Rial's weakness of mind furnished sufficient excuse for his conduct and any contention with him on such a delicate matter might evoke the sentiment that Helen should seek the affections of a different type of man and the doctor had no desire to involve her self-respect in a petty scandal of that kind.

In this frame of mind his turn came to claim Helen for a waltz, the graceful dance which offers to symmetry so many opportunities for display and to love so many chances of quiet and tender exchange of feeling.

"It grieves me to see you look so sad when all the others are gay," said the doctor as they took their places.

"I don't feel well," she returned with a wan smile.

"It is hard to escape the doctor's observation," said Mowbray, forcing himself to laugh at his own conceit in order to draw Helen away from her trouble.

"But he has no cure for some ailments,"

replied Helen glancing furtively at her partner.

"Your trouble is not very serious. I often use sudden remedies with patients. For instance Rial promised he would be faithful to you."

This unexpected information, so much at variance with Rial's public actions, was received by Helen with much doubt, but the doctor had caught her interest and meant to work upon it if only for her passing benefit.

"He promised me in this house." The doctor spoke emphatically.

"When," questioned Helen eagerly.

"A short time ago. I found him in despair at the thought of deceiving you. I spoke to him seriously, pointed out the folly of his conduct and he resolved solemnly to be faithful to you."

"How very kind on your part," she whispered in grateful accents. "But he treats me so differently before the public that I am horrified at the opportunity he gives for scandal. The false sympathy whispered to me aches and rends my heart."

"You must be patient," advised the doctor. "Rial is easily led by fleeting thoughts and you must acknowledge that Edith Busch would turn the head of a man of iron mould."

The doctor was thinking of his own feelings.

"She is extremely handsome, no doubt," admitted Helen with an admiring look in Edith's direction. "Do you know her?"

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Mowbray hesitated in a desire to evade the answer but she noticed the hesitation and her womanly curiosity being aroused she repeated the question to which he replied,

"I do—slightly."

"You have met her?"

"Yes."

"Would she make a good wife for Rial?"

The doctor felt palpably uneasy under this examination. He did not wish to betray the state of his mind to Helen but her direct manner seemed to search for the truth.

"Beautiful women are not always as good as they look," he said evasively, "but if you want my candid opinion I believe she would not."

"Why?" pressed Helen.

"Because I do not think she could ever love him."

Helen paused, half-pleased half-annoyed with this answer; pleased because the words were a relief to her feelings and annoyed because they cast a reflection on Rial's weak character.

They sat down in silence. The doctor did not observe the shade of pain which passed over Helen's face. How was it that she should feel so often the sting of candour in words spoken of the man she loved? Her eyes filled and she heaved a deep sigh.

Mowbray instantly recalled his indiscretion and hastening to atone for it, boldly added:

"She loves another."

This admission drew a grateful glance from Helen, whose old vivacity began to return in the light of the knowledge that Edith and Rial were separated by a barrier that could not be surmounted. The information renewed in Helen's breast the hope chilled almost to death by the coldness of Rial's conduct and neglect that night. She became cheerful and confident with Mowbray, and things quickly assumed a brighter aspect in his consoling and helpful presence.

"I wish Rial would get married at once. He is under bad influence in this house and I would like to see a change."

Helen hung down her head.

"Excuse me," went on the doctor, "for mentioning the opinion in your presence but I have reason for doing so. If he does not get married he will be ruined, for at present he is only a prisoner in his own house."

Helen gasped in astonishment at this news, which explained many apparently meaningless remarks in Rial's conversation. From the extraordinary appearance of the tutor and his strange action that night, she concluded there was some mysterious agency at work even in connection with the visits Rial paid to her house.

"Yes," continued the doctor as Helen listened breathlessly, "I discovered that Gabriel is the real master here, whose word is law and who has

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command of secret springs and passages which enable him to act the part of spy and eavesdropper in every room in this house."

Helen turned pale on hearing of the power in Gabriel's hands. If he were a bad man, with evil designs, her heart almost stopped at the thought of the mischief he might do; perhaps shut up Rial altogether and allow nobody to see or speak with him.

While her fears were exciting visions of danger, she became conscious that two small piercing eyes were riveted upon the doctor and herself.

"Mrs. Mason is watching us rather sharply," said Helen as she rose to hide the blush which that lady's scrutiny had brought to Helen's cheek.

"I don't care for her," said Mowbray. "She has a pleasant manner but there is something peculiar in her bearing which I cannot understand. Her presence should counteract the malign mastery of the tutor."

"I hope so," said Helen doubtfully.

Just then Edith brushed by and the doctor felt something pushed into his hand, which on examination proved to be a tiny scrap of paper on which was written in hurried style the following message:—"Will be at beach some evening within the next fortnight. Cannot appoint day or hour. Meet me.—Edith."

CHAPTER VI

The feeling of suspense and uncertainty and other mixed sensations under which the doctor laboured that night, was calmed by this significant little note. He had given up attempts to disentangle the web into which he found himself drawn, confident that time, with Edith's assistance, would make everything plain. For the present he surrendered himself to the intoxicating pleasure and rapturous belief that the moment of supreme bliss could not be long delayed, the moment when he could pour out the fervent passions of his heart and ask her to share in his joys and sorrows through life. The fact that the ball passed off without unpleasant incident or sign of danger, convinced him that Edith's suspicions were exaggerated, if not entirely groundless, and that she was magnifying for some cause, either deep affection or undue anxiety, the effect of the secret knowledge she possessed. All this would be cleared up at their interview and with light heart and the ardent delight of a soul filled with happy auguries, filled with the exalting

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charm of pure love, without the poison and filth of servile passions, he awaited the coming event.

Every afternoon found him wending his way to the beach to watch for Edith. He liked the solitude. It helped him to think, to speculate, to plan. Nature in its wealth of summer verdure reflected the range of his own happy thoughts. How glad he was to escape from the harsh, grating sounds of town life into the bright fields where the sun lit up the verdant scene and the birds trilled praise to the Creator! How glorious the beauty breathed from the soft sweep of emerald downs which spread out placidly beneath the clear azure sky and would retain their primeval freshness when thousands who contemplate their charm are buried beneath their bosom. And how grand looked the distant mountain in its stately magnificence, the waters of the bay lazily lapping its feet. Sublime in its calm strength, mysterious in its deep solemn silence, ever brooding a mighty loneliness, how long thought he, shall this rugged finger of God point the way to Heaven, prove to men the monotonous majesty of real greatness and never move from its own broad base? Truth is likened unto the Everlasting Hills. And Mowbray gazed interestedly at the natural counterpart of the biblical symbol, impressed with the firm dignity, the unyielding stability, of the great mass which could only be shaken when the whole earth trembled in dire convulsion.

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And then his thoughts wandered towards the sea. The vast glancing expanse of water stood still like a sun-worshipper in the presence of the glorious god of day. Not a sound was heard but a cooing intermittent ripple on the parched strand. He gazed earnestly into the face of the waters, thinking man's look might explain the marvellous power which reduces the restless, relentless mighty sea to impotence, or stirs the fierce whisper which echoing through hurrying winds brings forth the thunderous roar of storm and of stress. The problem baffled his puny mind but strengthened his faith in the Providence that rules over sea and earth. The best intellects of the world must bow in simple humility before the wonders wrought by the one great Master.

The picturesque surroundings had suggested these reflections during the doctor's daily wait for the fulfilment of Edith's promise. Now he had reached the last day of the allotted time and his patience began to give way to fear lest some unforeseen circumstance had upset the appointment, when he saw her approach more sylph-like and beautiful than ever. His whole being thrilled with rushing emotions at this critical moment. Would he trust his future, his life and his happiness to the word of this woman, or would he wait? It was a futile question now, a question out of place, for there could be but one answer, and that his decision to risk all upon Edith's reply.

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Edith came dressed in white, as a bride to the altar, wearing a happy smile and leaving behind her all trace of care and anxiety. With a look of eager delight which brought a blush to her fair cheeks, Mowbray advanced and as they shook hands cordially, they understood without speaking that a feeling deeper and stronger than friendship existed between them.

"You must pardon me for trying your patience so much," she began, "but I could not help it. Since the ball I have been a guest at Bayview House, not of my own free will but by design, and it was only to-day I could escape to come and thank you for your promise."

These words contained information which set the doctor's thoughts in a direction totally different from the groove into which they had fallen a moment before.

"A guest in Bayview House," he repeated with surprise, a look of doubt crossing his features as he glanced at Edith's beautiful face. "And not of your own free will," he went on rather astonished by this intelligence.

"Yes," she said quietly. "That is true."

"You tell me this deliberately." His tender feelings were now in the background and he spoke with a little sternness in his voice.

"Yes, deliberately and for a purpose."

The doctor thought a moment. Was she playing with his affections or had Rial obtained through

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Gabriel some mysterious power over her actions? Edith was looking towards the ground waiting for the doctor to speak the next word. Her graceful figure was quite close and the mad desire seized him to embrace and compel her to confess the secret which came between them at the very moment when the cup of bliss was presented to his lips. But he hesitated, as he remembered that he had no claim to make such a demand. They were comparative strangers in outward relations though their souls were in touch by daily remembrance of their first meeting. At least his whole being had been filled with thoughts in which she alone held sway but perhaps she was of slower temperament and colder nature and had come now merely to express her gratitude and no more.

"For a purpose," he murmured, using her own words. "The purpose, I suppose," and an unwonted bitterness emphasised the expression, "of becoming Rial's wife."

Edith looked up quickly, a flash of indignation in her eyes. Her whole frame shook with excitement as she said:

"I never thought you would speak an unjust word of me. If I wanted to become Rial's wife I could marry him at this moment, for the unfortunate boy is annoying me to death with declarations and attentions but he is not the man I could love and I have no intention of becoming his wife."

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She paused a second to recover her breath and then continued in calmer tones :

"I would not send you a letter of warning, I would not come here to-day, if my stay at Bayview House against my will brought the least reproach upon you for the promise you made to protect me. Cannot you see that I want your aid when I come to meet you in this manner?"

The doctor felt humbled in the presence of the woman for whom for weeks he had cherished the most sacred feelings of love and honour. Shame and remorse seized him for being guilty of the faintest suspicion to her discredit.

"Oh, Edith," he cried using her Christian name for the first time in the fulness of heartfelt sorrow, "you must forgive me for a hasty interpretation of your words. I never meant to be unfair, for I love you, I have loved you from the moment we first met and I cannot live without your love. Night and day your image has been before me, filling my soul and heart with one thought and one thought only, the hope that you would become my wife."

During this passionate outburst the doctor moved nearer to Edith and put his arm around her trembling form. She tried to escape but he pressed her to his heart and claimed the right to guard and defend her against the world. Though she yielded to his affectionate caresses, she was terribly agitated. Her soul had filled with a sense of

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new-born delight but something frightened her and she tried to speak. After two or three vain efforts she at last succeeded.

"And you must forgive me, dear George. For the present I cannot promise to become your wife, though I love and will ever love you."

"Why, dearest?" queried the doctor anxiously, shocked by this sudden damper on his happiness.

"I told you I was a guest in Bayview House against my will. I told you that deliberately and as I said for a purpose. The purpose is that you must watch over me and wait for the happy day when I am free to be your bride."

"Is there any danger in your position?"

She shuddered as she replied, "I cannot tell."

"But, my dearest Edith, why keep me in suspense? Why not tell me all? I have a right to know."

"Because it is a secret, a secret I am bound not to divulge and you of all men in this world will not ask me to break my bond."

"A rash oath need not be observed."

"It is not an oath but it is just as binding."

"Are you happy there?"

"No. I feel miserable since forced to reside in the place but I have been happy thinking of you, George, and thinking too that some day the troubles of the present may vanish like an ugly dream. Had I not met you and found new hope, my hours of existence would have been one long

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stretch of wretchedness and horror. I trusted you the moment I looked into your face."

This confession gave pain and satisfaction to the doctor. To gain her trust was worth a life effort, but to find her bound by some extraordinary tie to others racked and disturbed his mind. He could not easily reconcile her love for him with the refusal to tell what it was that prevented the absolute confidence which he felt entitled to possess. Doubts raised are dangerous to happiness but she had frankly admitted her inability to promise marriage and he had either to be satisfied with her explanation or break off relations and leave her to her fate. To her fate! The words though unuttered startled him with a sensation of terror. Could he act so cruelly as to allow harm to come without an effort to save her at any hazard? With a gesture of determination he cast all doubts from him, satisfied that her love was sufficient reward for his fidelity, sufficient reason to demand any sacrifice in her service.

"I trust you with all my heart," he said aloud, as if answering a look of painful uncertainty on Edith's face, "but tell me, dearest, do you fear Gabriel?" He put this question for the purpose of ascertaining if possible, whether Edith's secret had any connection with Gabriel's mysterious conduct in Bayview House.

Edith's reply was perfectly straightforward and convincing. "No," she said. "I do not exactly

fear him though I do not like him. Do not press me to give particulars. Indeed I feel that I should have resisted the inclination to confess my love for you. Your impetuous declaration took me completely by surprise, for I had determined not to admit the extent of my feelings, but the happiness of hearing you speak has overcome my discretion and I have allowed you to learn that my heart is yours and will be yours for ever. While the secret that I speak of stands between us you must never expect me to say more." Her eyes moistened as she gave utterance to the concluding sentence of this avowal.

It appeared useless to try and shake her resolution but the doctor, young, ardent, and fired with chivalrous hope, took her in his arms, kissed her fondly and implored her to leave Bayview at once and fly with him to another country. Why should she remain there nursing a secret that might wreck her life and his? He would not ask her about particulars if she consented to be his wife and leave the place for ever.

His passionate entreaties were pressed with the fervid eloquence of a strong man's endearing earnestness and love. At one time she seemed on the point of consenting but the struggle which kept her in a tremble of excitement ended in adherence to her original purpose and the doctor, almost exhausted by persuasive effort, promised not to speak further for the present.

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With a start Edith found time had passed quickly. The doctor saw a look of nervous apprehension leap into her eyes.

"Parting is cruel," he whispered with the sensitive feeling of a lover.

"But should we never meet again," she said, "how sad."

"Do not say so or you shall break my heart." There was great tenderness in his voice.

"Hearts have been broken thus," she said with a heavy sigh and pathetic look of regret.

"It cannot be in our case," replied the doctor gaily but with a lingering doubt that something might occur to prevent their meeting again. "I shall watch over you with jealous care and you will come back again when that terrible secret shall no longer trouble and we shall be free and happy ever afterwards."

She smiled at the doctor's confidence and once more held out her hand to say good-bye. This cold form of farewell did not appeal to the doctor's feelings. He insisted on a lover's right, but just as he drew her towards him she gave a cry of wild alarm and sank fainting into his arms.

A face had suddenly peered out from a sandy bank behind which its owner had been concealed.

CHAPTER VII

When she recovered from the swoon Edith looking dazed and terrified appeared to forget the doctor's presence.

"Where is he," was her first audible expression in which fear mingled with anxiety.

"Who?" asked the doctor looking about him in dismay.

Edith's eyes closed again and her contracted brow showed she was making an effort to collect her thoughts.

"I saw his face," she muttered.

Mowbray stood perplexed by what he considered incoherent and rambling statements.

"Oh," she groaned. "I saw his face when I thought he was far away from here. I am lost."

She opened her eyes and cast a bewildered look this way and that.

"There is nobody but ourselves on the strand," said the Doctor soothingly. "You must keep calm, my dear Edith. Your imagination is getting the better of your discretion."

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"But I saw his face," she insisted as her senses gradually returned.

"Whose face?" asked the doctor anxious to dispel her fears.

"The face of my worst enemy. If I went to the ends of the earth he would still haunt me. Why was I born for this trouble?"

"What is the trouble, dearest?"

"I cannot tell, George. I cannot tell. If I could give you my story it would relieve my heart of a great burden and sorrow. I cannot do it now. I hope to tell you some day—some day," and as she spoke her voice died down to a despairing murmur which filled the doctor with sad presentiments.

The blood had receded from Edith's face and she looked, on rising to her feet with the doctor's assistance, more like a beautiful marble statue than a woman of flesh and blood.

"I feel very sad," she moaned.

The strong arm of the doctor was supporting her and he spoke words of love and hope. She revived gradually but did not regain the lively manner of an hour before.

Moving in a state of distressing absorption, the doctor had to repeat several questions before she thought of replying.

"We must really part." She spoke these words like one suddenly recollecting a necessary duty. There was no regret in her voice. She seemed to have forgotten they were lovers, but the doctor

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made allowance for this knowing that some shock, real or imaginary, had seriously disturbed her mind. He raised no objection to her wish and accompanied her silently towards the public road where obtaining her assurance that she was strong enough to walk home, he saw her depart. He watched her retreating figure until it vanished beyond the rising ground near the suburbs and then with sorrow pressing his heart and an indescribable fear dogging every step he took, he returned to the town by another route. How sad, how lonely, how depressed in spirits, his interview had left him when he should be gay with the hope of a brilliant future with Edith. Love and happiness were his in those brief sweet moments of bliss but now the prospect looked dark with evil forebodings on account of this mysterious shadow upon Edith's life.

Next morning with the first faint glimmer of light and movement in Bayview, rumours of a tragic affair in Rial Greton's house began to pass from lip to lip. No particulars could be ascertained, but one fact stood out, clear, distinct and undeniable.

Edith Busch was dead.

The news overwhelmed Mowbray with stunning horror. He could not believe it. Some mistake had been made. "Oh God," he cried in anguish, "it cannot be true." He clung to hope. He refused to believe that this beautiful woman, his own Edith, the idol of his affections, had been struck down by the hand of death. Fate would

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never be so cruel as to crush one of Nature's fairest flowers in the early bloom of a glorious womanhood. It was impossible. Dead! The word chilled his blood and pierced his brain with an appalling sense of loss. He loved as no man had ever loved, with intense, virile passion, and she had spoken the words which made him hope to be soon the happiest man alive. Surely such a being was not removed from his life with love and promise fresh upon her lips.

But she was dead. The doctor quickly heard confirmation of the rumour from several sources. Each word that dispelled doubt went like a sharp arrow to his heart.

The lack of detail added to his pain. What had happened? He could make no attempt to answer the question. The shock had dulled his intellect, numbed his faculties and he could only repeat in a broken choking voice,—“Edith dead! Edith dead!”

The first terrible effects of mental anguish having passed away he staggered to the door and asked for the latest edition of the newspaper. Trembling violently as he turned over the pages, the paper dropped from his unsteady hand at sight of the following special announcement:

SAD FATALITY AT BAYVIEW HOUSE.

DEATH OF A YOUNG LADY.

“We regret to announce that Miss Edith Busch, a guest at Bayview House, has been the victim of

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a sad and distressing fatal accident. She was present with other friends of Mr. Greton in the drawing-room last evening when a revolver which Mr. Greton was examining exploded accidentally and the bullet lodged in the unfortunate young lady's breast. The family doctor being immediately summoned found life extinct. Death is believed to have been instantaneous but Mr. Fortescue refuses to give an opinion on this point. Mr. Greton and the other members of the household deeply lament the sad occurrence and are much depressed by the tragic suddenness of the calamity. It removes from the social life of Bayview a beautiful, brilliant and charming young lady who had already gained the esteem of many and the admiration of all. Her unexpected death will be much regretted by the people of this town, to whom she had become known as one of the most beautiful women ever seen in Bayview."

These were the plain and painful and fatal facts that stared at him from cold print where their accuracy could not be questioned in this case. All vestige of hope faded with the terrible truth as he bowed his head under the crushing grief of this awful moment in his life. They had met a few hours before in the full enjoyment of life and vigour; he had embraced her in the happy knowledge of their mutual love; and now she was dead. Her pulse would never again quicken, her heart would never again throb faster

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at words of love and trust from his lips, nor would his soul ever thrill at the glancing light, the graceful fascination of her look and smile. His world darkened in the gloom of this awful tragedy.

What are feelings and emotions against the cold hand of death—the spray that splashes in vain against the solid rock as it frowns stern and immutable upon the restless ocean!

Great shocks cannot of their nature endure long. After an interval the doctor's mind began slowly to battle with the dread fact of Edith's death. Then an impulse of action seized him and he read the paper again with the object of more fully comprehending the particulars of the accident and noting omissions as well as admissions. There seemed little in Dr. Fortescue's refusal to state whether death was instantaneous or not but it suggested the idea to Mowbray of seeing and questioning his friend about the details of the tragedy. He set off at once for Dr. Fortescue's residence, revived by the pleasant breeze that freshened the hot summer air, and glad to find him at home alone.

The old man knew nothing of the relations which existed between his assistant and Edith Busch and spoke in a cold professional style of the melancholy event.

"When were you called, sir?" queried Mowbray.

"I should say about one o'clock this morning.

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A messenger rang the bell and told me I was urgently needed at Bayview House as a frightful accident had occurred."

"Who was the messenger?"

"One of the servants I presume. I did not see his face clearly. I got ready at once but when I reached the street I saw nobody there though I had asked the man to wait for me. However, I set off briskly and reached the place twenty minutes after the message had been delivered.

"She was then dead?"

"She was killed on the spot, shot right through the heart. If it were deliberate it could not have been more deadly. Poor thing! Poor thing! It is a great pity to see such perfection going to the grave."

Mowbray suppressed a deep heart-breaking sigh and Fortescue remained silent.

"Did you make an examination?"

"Oh no; quite unnecessary. It was perfectly plain what had happened."

"Were there many present at the time of the accident?"

"I could not see Rial Greton himself. He was fearfully cut up, poor fellow, but Gabriel explained the circumstances."

At mention of this name, Mowbray listened with eager attention.

"He told me," continued the doctor, "that there were four persons in the room, his master, Mrs.

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Mason, the deceased young lady, and himself. For some time he said there were rumours of burglars prowling in the vicinity and Greton was induced for the safety and protection of the house to purchase two new revolvers. He had no knowledge of firearms himself but Gabriel explained their mechanism and how to use them in case of attack. Rial was examining one of the revolvers and showing Edith how to load and fire when suddenly the weapon exploded and to their horror and dismay she fell forward and never moved. The servants were immediately called and rushed in but they could render no assistance as there was nothing to be done. Poor Rial stood with the revolver in his hand looking at the prostrate form before him like one who had lost his senses. Mrs. Mason was inconsolable."

"Did Gabriel appear sorry?"

"His manner did not give me any particular impression of that kind. He was certainly the only cool and collected person in the house, but what a strange looking fellow he is, positively weird in a place of death. He seemed like a ghoul over the dead body ready to bear it off to some secret hiding-place and never be seen or heard of again."

"You are satisfied death was purely accidental?"

"Quite satisfied. Rial was simply infatuated with this girl and feels her death as a great blow and misfortune."

"Perhaps there are others who have an interest in her death," persisted the young practitioner.

"That may be, Mowbray, that may be, but I think the facts are very plain and incontrovertible and there is no good in raising suspicions without some foundation."

"I have reason to be suspicious because only a few hours before I saw the dead woman by appointment and she asked me to keep watch over her safety while in Bayview House. Why should she ask such protection unless she was in danger?"

"But, my dear fellow, an accident could happen to a person whose life was threatened as well as to a person whose life was not threatened. You have heard of men escaping death in the carnage of a pitched battle, to meet it in a squalid street accident. You must have much stronger ground for alleging foul play than the simple statement that she asked for your protection. A girl with romantic ideas in appealing to a man for whom she cared, might use that method to test the depth of his affection and mean nothing more than that he should play the part of knight-errant while she posed as the princess in distress. A young man at the outset of his career must exercise great caution in all serious matters connected with professional or private affairs."

Mowbray felt impatient at this unnecessary

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homily but the old man was often garrulous, and in this instance took pleasure in delivering himself of wise axioms.

"I feel, sir, your views are dictated by prudence," said the younger man, "but I am still puzzled about the identity of the messenger sent to call you and why I was overlooked although living nearer to the house."

"You must remember I am the family doctor," this he said with a touch of pride, "and when grave necessity arises I am naturally first thought of." The gleam in the old man's eye resented the pretence of his subordinate to be summoned in case of urgency. "As regards the messenger his identity is immaterial and I have taken no trouble to inquire who it was." He spoke in a tone that suggested unusual severity for a man of his unbane manners.

"I meant no offence, I assure you, I was thinking of your ease and convenience when I mentioned that I live nearer to Bayview House than you do. I would not wish to see you disturbed when I could have answered the summons."

This explanation restored the old man's equanimity and Mowbray took occasion to ask:

"Do you think Gabriel was the messenger?"

"No, I am quite positive the man who called me, and Gabriel are not identical. But I observe that Gabriel appears to give you trouble. Will you tell me why?"

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Mowbray paused awhile. Then looking the old man full in the face said solemnly:—

“I am convinced in my inner thoughts but without evidence that Edith Busch has been the victim of foul play.”

CHAPTER VIII

Dr. Fortescue fell back in his chair in sheer open-eyed astonishment, overcome by the bare possibility of such a terrible deed. He looked sharply at the serious and firm countenance of his assistant and saw there a deep conviction of the truth of what Mowbray had said.

"A murder in Bayview House," murmured the old man, then paused and added "impossible," as if it were a desecration, beyond the wickedness of man to accomplish in a house where peace and love and happiness prevailed during the forty years of his connection with the Greton family.

"Only I know your faculties are in good order," he said, turning to Mowbray, "I would say you are suffering from some extraordinary hallucination. What has put this idea of murder into your head or what evidence can you produce to prove the statement?" It was a direct forcible question, such as judge or criminal lawyer would ask as the basis of all further investigation. A charge of murder involved the life of the per-

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petrator if discovered; it ruined the character of the man who made the accusation if unproved; and Mowbray pondered for a time before he replied.

"I have no evidence whatever at present to bring home the charge to any person but I am putting together all the facts within my knowledge and I have come to the conclusion that her death was not accidental; that the report has been inspired and prepared by Gabriel; and that there is much more in the whole affair than has been allowed to leak out."

"That is mere suspicion without any tangible evidence," argued old Fortescue.

"Yes, that is so," went on the younger man, "but when Edith Busch appealed to me, she never hinted the nature of the overhanging danger but it is now apparent that she had reason to fear the stealthy hand of the assassin and he has sprung upon her at the very time she perhaps believed herself safe and secure from attack. It is in the celerity of the deed that the ingenuity of the criminal is manifest. If he gave time or permitted Edith to call assistance his fell hand might be stayed and the life of Edith spared to those who loved her."

Dr. Fortescue noticed that his assistant was visibly affected while speaking.

"You have a deep interest in this question," hinted the old man.

"I have," admitted the other, "a very deep

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interest indeed, because Edith and I loved each other."

Old Fortescue sat up suddenly and looked at George Mowbray.

"How long did you know her?"

"Since I came to Bayview."

"You foolish boy to fall in love so quickly without any previous intimacy with the girl. What did you know of her or who was she?"

"She was beautiful—a young man's grand excuse."

"Ah," pursued Fortescue reflectively, "I understand. A woman's bright eyes are always more attractive than her biography. It is well perhaps that is the case. But it is useless now to question your choice. You are widowed as a lover and I am sorry for you."

The pathos in the old man's words touched the young doctor deeply.

"That is the reason I vow here in your presence to have justice done to her memory if she has been treated as I suspect." Mowbray declared his resolution in a voice full of emotion and determination.

"But I do not think you have anything to do. An unhappy accident has occurred and there the matter ends. What motive could you suggest for murder? It is an old principle of detection to find the motive and the criminal can be easily discovered. What is the motive in this case?"

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"I have to find out the motive. It is the point of the mystery which I have been unable to penetrate, for Edith herself refused any information whatever on the ground that she could not divulge a secret which she was bound to preserve."

"Oh," cried the old man, "there is a secret, and something so serious that she refused to tell you."

Mowbray answered in the affirmative and then gave a history of his first meeting with Edith Busch, the incident of the veiled woman, the letter warning him not to dance with or recognise her at the ball, the interview at the beach, their one short hour of supreme felicity and then her sudden collapse, her terror at a face which she declared belonged to her greatest enemy, her hurry to leave him and return to Bayview House, the request to watch over her, a duty now needless, and then the swift and awful news of her death. All the circumstances leading up to the dread climax precluded in Mowbray's mind any theory but that of deliberate and premeditated homicide.

The old man listened breathlessly to the romantic facts disclosed.

"Did you," he asked, "take any step privately to find out who the veiled woman was or where she disappeared to?"

"No," replied Mowbray. "I blame myself that I did not institute inquiries on the spot and have the woman traced and kept under obser-va-

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tion. She undoubtedly possessed great influence over Edith for her very appearance terrified and startled Edith out of her wits."

"According to your facts," continued the doctor in an analytical strain, "Edith was frightened in the first instance by a woman and in the second by a man. Were these people working separately or together in the interests of a third party? If they were acting separately what could be the motive in each case, for a man and woman acting in that manner could scarcely have similar motives?"

"I am not sure of the presence of the man," interrupted Mowbray, "whose face Edith insisted she had seen. I looked around at the time but saw no trace of any person on the strand. I thought it fancy on Edith's part but her death puts a different complexion upon her words and makes me believe that, as she stated, her greatest enemy was lurking in secrecy beside her and that he has instigated if he has not actually committed the terrible deed in Bayview House. I believe the details prepared for you and given to the newspaper are meant to give the plausible excuse of accident to a shocking and abominable crime."

"Such strong views are probably entertained in consequence of your intimate relations with Edith and your natural disinclination to believe that she came by her death accidentally but while

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you raise doubts in my mind, from an examination of the circumstances, and using a calm, unbiassed judgment, my reason compels me to say that you have no substantial foundation for the belief that a crime has been committed.

As Dr. Fortescue finished speaking a knock at the door prevented further discussion and Helen entered at her father's bidding. Her pale face and sunken eyes told Mowbray of suffering which she attempted to conceal but he knew too well the symptoms of physical and mental unrest to be deceived by a woman's desire to suppress her agitation.

"My dear," said her father tenderly, "Dr. Mowbray is under the impression that this unhappy affair at Bayview is of a more serious nature than we thought."

"What!" ejaculated Helen turning on the young doctor a look of sharp surprise and inquiry. Helen possessed a quick intelligence and guessed the meaning of her father's words.

"Whom do you suspect?" Her question was prompted by the fear that Rial Greton's name would be associated with the crime. Edith's death had removed the cause of estrangement between Rial and herself and she had reason to think their old relations might be restored, but if Mowbray's suspicions were well founded, it meant consequences which she shuddered to contemplate. She listened with painful trepidation to his reply.

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"I cannot say that I suspect anybody at present. My suspicions are directed to the character of the event, not to any individual connected with it."

"But in the published account Rial admits he had the revolver in his hand. It is frightful indeed to have life taken by accident but if he is charged with murder what a terrible horror it would be."

Helen's nature revolted at the probability of being connected in the remotest degree with a case of this kind. Mowbray had much sympathy for her dejected appearance and to relieve the burden weighing upon her mind and reflected in her downcast features he explained without hesitation that his suspicions would exonerate Rial from any connection whatever with Edith's death. This seemed strange and inexplicable to Helen and entirely contradictory of published facts, but at the same time it ousted her morbid reflections and kindled a better and brighter feeling in her heart. The knowledge that Rial had shed human blood, even accidentally, affected Helen beyond measure for she had an innate horror of homicide, but when the person killed was a rival in the estimation of all who saw what took place at the ball, she felt that between Rial and herself there now stood a barrier which could only be removed by indisputable proof of his innocence. Mowbray's assurance therefore, though grounded on suspicion which should be verified by facts, gave hope

that Rial's hands were guiltless and that Helen could face the world without the taunt of regaining her influence over him by wading through Edith's blood. Fervently did she pray God in her inmost soul that Mowbray's belief would come true and leave Rial's character free from the red stain of guilt.

Unconsciously her father threw her thoughts back into a cauldron of seething misery by affirming that in his opinion the newspaper facts were a reasonable explanation of the occurrence and it were foolish to try and establish a crime where all the evidence pointed to accident.

"Might I ask," said Mowbray rather suddenly, seeing that Helen was again miserable, "what is your opinion of Louis Gabriel and of his character?"

This question addressed to her father made Helen look towards him with much curiosity. The trend of Mowbray's suspicion had dawned upon her.

"Gabriel," replied Dr. Fortescue, is long enough in the Greton family to be above reproach. He is an excellent man so far as I know, with peculiar notions about the training of youth. Mrs. Greton desired that Rial should be brought up under his charge in an atmosphere of purity and simple pleasure and he has faithfully discharged his trust."

"I think," interrupted Mowbray, rather disgusted

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that such a good opinion should be held of Gabriel, "he has made a complete fool of that young fellow. What is more I think he has done so for a purpose and that purpose I must endeavour to find out. I have not told you of my visit to Bayview House and learning there under my own observation that Gabriel was the master and a boorish master and Rial the slave."

"You told me that," said Helen, "and I am inclined to share your view. There has always been some haunting tyranny over Rial's life which made him appear absurd to other people."

"I believe his mother was largely responsible for spoiling Rial in his youth," remarked Dr. Fortescue in reply to his daughter's observation. "His father and I often discussed the foolish manner in which Mrs. Greton acted towards her child. She would not allow him to associate with other children, to attend public school, or take his place in manly games or exercises, for fear he should become vulgar and unfit for polite society. She kept him altogether to herself, secluded from companions of his own age, and thus trying to produce a perfect gentleman left behind her a refined weakling."

"And my opinion," declared Mowbray with emphasis, "is that advantage was taken of this weakness in Rial's character to hatch some plot around him of which the death of Edith Busch is the first move."

"Then you suspect Gabriel who, if he is con-

cerned, must have been maturing the idea in his brain for a considerable time." Dr. Fortescue spoke suggestively.

"How long are Rial's parents dead? asked Mowbray.

"His father died two years ago and his mother a short time afterwards."

"That is not a long time for a wicked man to plan a serious crime from the consequences of which he hopes to escape. At any rate we must commence from the date when Rial was left entirely in the hands of Louis Gabriel."

CHAPTER IX

The young doctor's patients included the wife of a successful merchant who once lived in the crowded street but who had grown wealthy enough to satisfy a craving for semi-rural grandeur and had accordingly settled in a detached suburban residence. Since this change took place Mrs. Hurst's ambition had been to forget the past, especially her marked plebian origin, and to be reckoned as one of the rich and exclusive families of the neighbourhood. The position of independence which her husband had achieved was not won without a struggle in which she proved a lucky partner and adviser, but the qualities that helped to gain prosperity developed a hard and calculating nature which narrowed down the guiding principles of life to the possession or want of money. It became the sole standard by which she judged and condemned or exalted her neighbours. This selfish, ignorant, contemptible disposition, the wanton worship of money-bags, became so pronounced a characteristic of her life and conduct that few

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envied and none respected her pompous vulgarity.

She made constant attempts to obtain the social recognition of people whose stud-book registers nothing of doubtful origin and whose ranks are not always open to the newly rich. But neither money nor abuse could secure a footing within the social circle in which her ambition centred and she drifted into a state of isolation, above her own class, beneath the other, in a town where only two existed, and in this friendless state she had no pleasure in life except the arid comfort of the miser. Her temper soured into hatred of those whom she held responsible for this treatment and she became the vigilant, spiteful, determined enemy of every individual suspected of being concerned in her ostracism.

There was one exception. She required the services of a clever medical attendant and Mowbray after two visits had by his chivalrous courtesy and delicate attention won her particular favour. She summoned him now for a third time, owing to heart spasms which occasionally gave her great alarm, but before his arrival the danger had passed away. During other visits she occupied her bedroom but on this occasion he found her downstairs in a large apartment so furnished that it presented the appearance of a trader's mart in which comfort and repose were sacrificed to extravagant display. The costly ornaments, beautiful pictures, prints and photographs, huddled together confusedly, bespoke

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riches without taste and a desire for luxury without elegance.

Mrs. Hurst's features if not repugnant sailed close to the wind, with a turned-up nose, and massive, rather flabby red face redeemed from downright ugliness by expressive dark eyes which in her youth must have constituted the main charm for her lord—not her master. Her voice, deep-chested and harsh, emphasised the absence of feminine attributes and placed her in the category of women of masculine mould, leaving, however, the impression of strength and individuality in her character.

Mowbray thought well to gain the good opinion of this woman, whom nobody loved and many feared, and took occasion to advance in her friendship by the kindly display of anxious deference which he invariably paid to the feelings of all his patients. His presence and confident assurance that her health was excellent cheered her into good humour and she complimented him upon his success in Bayview and expressed her belief that a prosperous career awaited him at his profession. She even ventured to exceed good manners by questioning him on his private affairs.

"I think you can put two and two together, doctor," she said with a short smile in which the commercial instinct was indelicately expressed.

The doctor felt puzzled.

"You must be clever at riddles. Don't shake your head. You can solve this: An old doctor

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with an only daughter wants as assistant a clever young man with first-class diplomas. Money no object. What happens?"

Both laughed at the idea conveyed in the matrimonial agent's form.

"Of course," she added, "it is already fixed in the public mind that you are to marry Helen Fortescue and they lived happy ever afterwards will be spoken as in the story books."

Mrs. Hurst shared with the manageress of a servant's registry the doubtful honour of being the best informed person in the town on the private affairs, history and scandals of all the other residents, and she had no doubt Dr. Mowbray's purpose in coming as assistant to Dr. Fortescue was to lay siege to Helen's heart. But she knew little about Helen, notwithstanding patient and persistent inquiries, and she sprang this discussion upon the doctor for the purpose of ascertaining his feelings towards Helen or any other confidences he wished to impart.

Between Mrs. Hurst and Helen there was silent, deadly antipathy. They never spoke, yet they felt a strange, uncontrollable sense of aversion when they passed each other in the public street. Helen considered Mrs. Hurst a horrid woman, Mrs. Hurst considered Helen too superior for an ordinary mortal, and the fire of dislike, suppressed, burned the fiercer in each other's minds.

The doctor knew nothing of the bitter feeling

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of enmity between them. He had therefore no idea of the malign purpose behind Mrs. Hurst's remarks.

"The public know more than I do," said Mowbray answering her statement.

Mrs. Hurst rose slowly from her chair and came beside Mowbray. She gave him the idea of a battleship cleared for action. Her eyes flamed like searchlights sweeping the horizon and her heavy brows rose high like guns trained on a distant object. He was surprised at this sudden change. It meant war where he had expected peace and he summoned up the smile which a man wears when he looks down the muzzle of a loaded gun.

"Doctor," she snapped the word viciously, "I have been snubbed in a cruel way. Rial Greton's father and my husband were particular friends and we should have been among the guests invited to his dance. We were ignored deliberately; insulted without any reason except envy of our success. Wealth is a passport to the highest society in every town but Bayview. Rich people sit side by side with the élite of society. Here we are cut off by the malice of foolish and false pride. But let me tell you, doctor, that every snub we receive is a fresh incentive to rise into a place from which we can look down with contempt on the set who try to ignore our position at present. If my husband gets his knighthood those creatures will fawn upon our favour. They have their day—it will be short—but our day, the day of money and its power, is

a long day, a day of triumph, a day of revenge." Scorn and defiance mingled in this passionate outburst. Its vehemence surprised the doctor. The terrible wrath and hate apparent in her ferocious manner appeared out of all proportion to the cause. He did not know that this statement had a personal motive behind its purpose and that in general terms Helen Fortescue had been particularly aimed at as the person to blame for the omission of Mrs. Hurst's name from the list of Rial Greton's guests.

The doctor ventured to express some words of sympathy.

"I have great contempt for expressions of sympathy," said Mrs. Hurst with an apologetic smile—except from a sincere person. So many pretended friends avail of that form of wounding your susceptibilities that I prefer the bite of a serpent to the hand-shake of a false sympathiser. I regard you as a real friend, otherwise I should not speak to you as I have done."

The doctor who stood in the thunderstorm with the lightning playing about his head felt relieved at those words.

"I feel I can rely on your friendship and confidence," she continued, "and I want you to trust me as your friend. There are people working to keep me down the ladder but I have risen by many rungs and mean to get to the top."

Mrs. Hurst's temper gradually cooled down to a thoughtful and determined expression of counten-

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ance. In her square strong face and defiant eye one read the traits of a woman of purpose. Mowbray abhorred the Amazon but in return for her friendship overlooked her failings. The story of her struggle interested him. She was an example of untiring persistence against natural obstacles. Lacking the greatest force any woman can command—personal magnetism; lacking the moral attributes that gave polish to the plainest of her sex, she still exercised an assertive temperament with such force that even those opposed to her success believed she could gain any object upon which she had set her heart. Had she been invited to the ball she would have gone to gratify the wish long entertained of seeing and studying Helen Fortescue and Rial Greton face to face. That object was denied. She had felt insulted by the neglect, and her mind was busy with the best mode of revenge within her power.

So you have no intention of asking Helen's hand?" pursued Mrs. Hurst with apparent indifference.

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I loved another."

"Who was she?"

The doctor hesitated.

"I asked you to trust me. Are you unwilling?"

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"Pardon me, I hesitated with delicacy at the thought of referring to a dead woman."

"Edith Busch?" uttered Mrs. Hurst with unfeigned amazement. Mowbray inclined his head and both remained silent.

"How did you first meet her?" asked Mrs. Hurst after a pause.

"By accident."

"Accidents seem to have happened strangely in her case but her death was no accident."

Mowbray stood startled by the statement as if it were a revelation to him and not an echo of his own suspicions. Mrs. Hurst noticed the change her words had produced.

"You are surprised," she went on, "I thought you knew that already. Surely her lover should be aware of the real cause of her death."

"I have only suspicions," he explained with some timidity in the presence of this abrupt, strong-minded woman. He feared to express himself openly lest he might say too much.

"Suspicions! suspicions!" she repeated the words contemptuously. "What good are suspicions? You must have something more, you must find out something more, if you want to prove that she was killed because she loved you?"

The bold statement of direct motive overwhelmed Mowbray. He had no idea of such a reason before he heard Mrs. Hurst assert it. Could it be that her love for him had been the cause of

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her destruction? He shuddered as a sense of heavy responsibility shot across his mind.

"You have formed definite conclusions," urged the doctor.

"Certainly." She spoke shortly but emphatically.

And who in your opinion killed Edith?

"It is not an opinion of mine. It is the evidence of an eye-witness. She was killed by Rial Greton."

CHAPTER X

George Mowbray sat in his study, his brain fagged with the pressure of many emotions. Edith dead, the world a blank, his heart broken, his affections torn from the roots, what had the future or life itself to promise? He brooded in a great sorrow. The thought came to fly away to an unknown and distant land where time and change might help him to forget, but the memory of his loved one would return at such moments and urge him like an irresistible impulse to remain, and if she had been wronged to avenge her death.

In his dreamy moods he pictured Edith's form so vividly that he believed she stood before him ; he was again in the strand, passionate words upon his lips, his arms clasping her yielding form in the ecstasy of love, and then a wild scream, always that terrible scream, would startle him into consciousness and bring back with reality the horrible truth that she was really dead.

When the town bustled with the activity of

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strenuous life he used to seek her grave in the parish churchyard and with bare head and sad, disconsolate face gaze silently at the sacred spot which contained her ashes. She slept the long last sleep in a lonely corner where the sunbeams never rested and the thought of the shadows which darkened her young life gave a weird interest to the gloom and filled him with its melancholy appropriateness. A weeping willow grew beside the encircling wall and when the wind stole out from the west a gentle murmuring lullaby whispered peace to the soul departed.

No voice could sound from beneath the grave but there alone over the cold earth that robbed him of his beloved he poured out his soul to the shades of the dead:

"Rest, Edith darling, rest; rest from the strife of life and the cares that afflict humanity. Could your gentle spirit cross the great abyss that separates life from death let it hear me tell again of a love that can never perish. Only the grave shall come between us and you will wait my coming, but before my work is done, one duty must be discharged, to clear up the mystery that clouded your days and sent you to an early and violent death."

As he ceased speaking he raised his hand to Heaven to witness the vow thus made in a solemn manner.

With the conviction that her death was not

accidental there grew upon him the difficulty of discovering the truth. There was no clue so far except the statement of Mrs. Hurst, which if true inclined to the theory of accident. He could not believe that Rial Greton took Edith's life deliberately and if Rial were responsible for the discharge of the revolver he should assume in order to justify suspicion that another hand had directed its aim. Still Mrs. Hurst's positive assertion that an eye-witness had seen Rial Greton kill Edith must be the starting-point of investigation, and until Mowbray was satisfied that some other person was concerned, he would have to suspend judgment as to whether a murder had been committed or not.

In a small town where the news fare is limited, a tragic death is a substantial sensation. The townspeople were feasting for days on the Bay-view tragedy, repeating and commenting upon the smallest details, and when it leaked out that a mystery surrounded the affair, the appetite for particulars necessitated the invention of wild stories to gratify public curiosity.

The word "murder" began to be whispered ominously. Who spoke it first nobody could tell. Then the charge took definite shape. Edith Busch having refused to marry him, Rial Greton had shot her in a fit of rage and jealousy. This terrible story gained rapid credence. It was a desperate and cowardly crime people said, to kill

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a friendless girl in his own house, where the laws of hospitality and honour and manhood demanded every precaution for her safety, and this opinion spreading fast among all classes of the population Rial Greton's name passed into a byword and reproach. They were ashamed to name him as a fellow-townsmen; and demands for his immediate apprehension were made with violent denunciations of his criminal act.

Mrs. Hurst's vow of revenge had begun to work smoothly and effectively. The owner of Bayview House who had neglected to include her among his guests was now so poor in character that none would speak a kind word of him. In public estimation he was a felon worthy only of a felon's doom.

But his destruction was not sufficient to appease Mrs. Hurst's hatred. She could have spared Rial but his ruin was necessary in order to accomplish the ruin of Helen Fortescue.

Helen was an excellent girl notable for her truth, sincerity and benevolence. The respect for her father had increased to popular love of his child. The people were proud to claim her friendship and revered her with intense love and admiration. No word of blame or suspicion had ever been tolerated against her fair fame. She stood firm in public affection, shielded from envy and evil taunt by the high regard and confidence of her friends and neighbours.

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The harsh condemnation pronounced upon Rial caused her heart to sink with fear lest her name should also be involved. Edith's death had been a shock to Helen. But Edith had come between her and Rial and in her secret soul she could not mourn the deplorable event. Her anticipation of trouble sprang from this cause. Might it not be said that she desired Edith's death, that it removed a formidable rival and that Rial would return to his first love when the influence that kept them apart had disappeared for ever?

There were sufficient reasons for Helen's instinctive fears. Rumour like fire spares nothing in its way. It soon began its foul work upon her reputation, blackening and defiling a hitherto stainless character. She was startled to find that the very thoughts she guarded with secret care were subjects of public gossip. A frightful distortion of motive linked Rial's and Helen's names together in defamation and dishonour.

"Seek out," said the accusers, "the person whom the crime benefits and you find Helen Fortescue."

Great God! The abominable insinuation borne to Helen's ears petrified her like sentence of death upon the condemned criminal. How monstrous, she protested, that people should circulate such a false and scandalous charge. Her blood ran cold under the blast of popular execration and the appalling injustice wrought by lying tongues. She

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was wronged by Rial; she was doubly wronged by this hideous attack upon her innocence. What did it all mean? Some awful mistake had been made or some desperate enemy was at work to accomplish her shame.

She never believed such infamous malice could be excited against her and the injustice was so glaring, so monstrous, that clad in the armour of righteous indignation she cast all fear away and prepared for a struggle in which she made up her mind to stand by Rial in his hour of need and assert his innocence in which she believed and her own of which she was perfectly conscious. "The rock stands firm," she said, "against the fury of the waves that hiss and roll and fret and thunder against it in vain. Let me too stand firm before every shock. Let me show what a weak woman can do when her heart becomes a rock between the man she loves and the world thirsting for his blood." It was a noble resolve; an ordeal not to be lightly faced by the most courageous.

She was hounded down with remarkable persistence. She had surely instigated the whole tragedy, so her assailants said, and there could be no other possible explanation of the mystery. Gradually her best friends ceased their visits; they gave polite excuses though Helen saw in their looks the real reason of their defection. When she appeared in the streets the ugly, staring,

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impertinent curiosity of all sorts of people, their jeering whispers, their hard, unsympathetic, sometimes cruel ejaculations, told too plainly the deep feeling excited against her.

Bayview had many churches and chapels of the Christian creed which were attended by people carrying religious literature sufficient to save Sodom and Gomorrah and in which ministers preached charity to crowded congregations, but without the buildings, those people who listened with apparent reverence and humility to the Word of God within, became proud, sneering backbiters and hypocrites, well-dressed and well-washed, but with unclean minds and hearts, who tarnished the reputation of innocent people like Helen Fortescue with the easy gaiety of the sweep who blackens with filth the man who lifts him from the mire. The destruction of the character of a respectable person is one of the joys that compensate for life in overgrown villages where enmity has more opportunities for doing harm than benevolence can every rectify.

The outcry against Helen brought Mowbray to her side with all the chivalrous gallantry of an ancient knight defending the honour of his lady love. For the friends who fell away he expressed the biting contempt of a true and generous heart. None suffered more by Edith's death than he had suffered, but Helen had less connection with the tragedy than he had and was less responsible for

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the event which brought the deep frowning shadows of shame upon her young life. He hastened to tell her how maddened he felt by the wicked, malignant, and foul wrong done under pretence of bringing the guilty to justice, and punishing those suspected of interest in the crime or of friendship with the criminal.

Lines of care and sorrow began to show in the haggard face of Helen. The doctor was glad however to read defiance in her eye and determination in her tightly compressed lips.

"We have to prepare for extraordinary developments. You and I suspect Gabriel, that is, if no accident has occurred, but against us there is the strong fact that an eye-witness saw Rial kill Edith."

Helen staggered back a step or two and gasped out an incredulous, "No, no, it is not true," in reply to the doctor's assertion.

"But," he continued in the solicitous manner often necessary in his profession when probing a wound for the welfare of the patient, "I have the information from the person to whom the witness told it."

Pale almost to ghastliness this admission brought back all Helen's unnerving fears and removed the anchor of hope to which she clung, the hope that Rial Greton was entirely innocent of Edith's death. She would have collapsed completely despite her heroic resolve, but for Mowbray's next words.

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"Till I am sure of the name of the witness, the position he occupies, and the place from which he observed what happened on that night, I will not give the least credence to the statement."

Hope again revived Helen and her look betokened gratitude to the man who spoke these words.

"We are two against the whole town," she said after a short interval, "for even my father thinks an accident has happened. We, however, know something which other people do not and as knowledge is power we must use our power. I have made up my mind to act and act promptly. For that reason I propose to visit Bayview House at once and demand an interview with Rial. He cannot refuse my request. My visit may be used against me hereafter but I must end the terrible suspense of this business and have the whole truth from his own lips. I trample on my pride by going to see him after his conduct towards me, but what is pride when greater interests are at stake. Our honour is involved, and it may be that the very life of Rial himself is jeopardised by the turn events have taken."

The blood rose to her cheeks at the thought of instant action and with the assurance that she would return within an hour left the doctor alone.

In less than half an hour she was back again looking annoyed and disappointed.

"Well?" asked Mowbray who had doubts about

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the wisdom of her visit but did not wish at the time to prevent it.

"What did he say?"

"Do you mean Rial?"

"Yes."

"He is not at home."

"Who told you?"

"Gabriel."

"Hum!" muttered the doctor. "I thought that would be the case."

"Rial would not refuse to see me if he were at home." Her love still remained undiminished by failure or neglect.

"I am sure he would not if he knew you had called, but Gabriel never delivered your message, and probably framed the excuse on seeing you approach the house."

Helen looked surprised. She had accepted Gabriel's statement in good faith and never thought of questioning its accuracy until the doctor's keener intellect saw a probable ruse to get rid of her presence and at the same time prevent any communication between herself and Rial.

The doctor had taken the precaution of sending a man to make enquiries at the gate lodge.

This individual returned as Helen had finished her explanation.

"Did you see the gate-keeper," demanded Mowbray promptly.

"Yes, sir."

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"Is Mr. Greton at home?"

"He is, sir."

"Did you learn anything else?"

"I got into conversation with the old man and praised his flowers and the comfort of his house. I saw an electric button on the back wall. I asked him what that was for. He told me it was used to signal to the house when any person called who wanted to see Mr. Greton."

"Anything else?"

"After a time he told me that he had instructions to press the button once when a person whom he knew called, to press twice when a lady called, and to press three times when a stranger called."

"This is an extraordinary business," said Helen, perfectly astounded.

"The place has been turned into a miniature fortress with electric communication to prevent surprises. That is a useful discovery. I had almost despaired of finding a way to begin my operations, but now I think we must devote our attentions and energies to Bayview House." The doctor spoke with confidence and looked pleased with the information just given.

"I wonder why I was denied an interview with Rial," queried Helen with a puzzled expression on her face.

"That is exactly the central point of our inquiry," replied the doctor. "You were denied the interview because Rial has something to say which will alter

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the whole aspect of the case and show whether our suspicions are correct or not. We must therefore look for the solution of the mystery within the walls of Bayview House."

CHAPTER XI

The barren result of Helen's visit set the doctor thinking of Gabriel's object in preventing an interview with Rial. There was some powerful reason for his action. Either Rial had committed the deed and Gabriel was endeavouring to shield him, or else a statement by Rial would disclose particulars which Gabriel desired in his own interest to keep secret. This made an interview with Rial absolutely essential to the success of any effort to learn the whole truth.

The police had accepted the theory that Edith's death was purely accidental. Their investigation and the inquest were mere formalities hurried through without any attempt to bring circumstances to light which would lead to further inquiry. Mrs. Mason identified the deceased as her friend, Gabriel repeated the published version of the occurrence and the jury gave the only possible verdict on the evidence. These facts were serious obstacles in Mowbray's way but after due deliberation he decided to disregard the action of the police and jury and

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adhere to the assumption that Edith had met with foul play and that without his intervention a crime would go undiscovered and unpunished.

His thoughts returned to the suspicious conduct of the human sphinx who guarded all access to Bayview House. If an accident had occurred Rial's story could do no harm to anyone, but Rial's forced concealment and the elaborate arrangement to prevent surprise visits, combined with the previous knowledge that Edith had been detained against her will, compelled the conclusion that the doctor's original suspicions were well founded and that no further time should be lost in idle conjecture but something done to verify his belief.

With this decision come to, pending an effort to see Rial, he determined to visit Mrs. Hurst for the purpose of learning the name of the man who alleged he had been a witness of Edith's death.

"I will give the name," she said, "on one condition and one condition only."

"And that is," added the doctor expectantly.

"That Rial Greton is brought to justice." There was bitter malice in her tone and triumph in her eye. She held the winning card in this game of life and death.

"Why not give the information to the police?"

"Because," she answered, "I do not wish to appear interested."

"But there is an obligation on every good citizen to help justice."

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Mrs. Hurst laughed cynically. "Our interests are not always with the cause of justice. Besides men are paid for that good work. And might I ask if your anxiety is dictated by a strict sense of a citizen's responsibility?"

"It is," explained Mowbray promptly. I believe notwithstanding the information you possess that Rial Greton is innocent; there is no proof, admitting he fired the shot, that he intended to commit murder; but even if the fact is established that he was seen to shoot Edith Busch it does not destroy the theory of accident."

"When a man deliberately raises a revolver and shoots a woman you cannot call it an accident. I call it murder and that is what took place."

"You take the extreme view," argued the doctor; "I have formed a different opinion. I came to seek your help not for Rial's sake alone, but to spare the humiliation to Helen Fortescue of seeing the man she loves placed in a position of danger and disgrace. The people are openly accusing him of the crime, but there is no evidence against him and the police remain inactive. If you tell me the name of the man who witnessed the tragedy I can continue inquiries in order to elicit the real facts."

At the mention of Helen Fortescue's name all the savage instincts of Mrs. Hurst's uncouth nature broke loose from restraint.

"Helen Fortescue," she hissed with the contemptuous and sardonic rage worthy of a demon.

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"You don't know me," she cried paling to a livid hue under the strain of ungovernable passion. "Helen Fortescue is an enemy I must crush like a worm under my foot. She hates me and thwarts me everywhere her voice is heard. Now you ask for mercy. Never, never." Mrs. Hurst foamed at the mouth like a wild animal. "When I see Rial in the hands of the hangman and Helen hooted from Bayview I will be satisfied, but not till then. I am waiting. The time must come."

This frenzied outburst appalled the doctor. Was such deadly hatred possible in a woman? Her exhibition would do credit to the foul denizens of Inferno who are supposed to be particularly skilled in the darkest moods of malice and revenge. The source of the rumours against Rial Greton and Helen Fortescue stood revealed in the uncontrollable rage of this terrible woman. He read as in an open book the motive and aim, kept secret, and the story of diabolical invention and suggestion, made public, for the ruin of two innocent people. An enemy unmasked is not dangerous and the doctor suppressing his indignation and contempt, left abruptly.

The doctor was prepared for disappointment at the outset of his enquiries. Mrs. Hurst's violent temper had betrayed her ignoble purpose and that knowledge meant so much gain but he was still ignorant of the identity of her informant. As a man of resource he knew that when one attempt failed another course should be tried and he there-

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fore called to his assistance the person who in the last chapter performed the work of cautious inquiry with such complete satisfaction. He was named Harry Duncan, a man heavily built and of great strength, with surprising agility for one of his large appearance. Harry seemed a useful man in dangerous and difficult work.

"I want you," said the doctor, to his stalwart friend, when they were alone, "to watch Mrs. Hurst's and find out who it is from Bayview House that visits her place. You must act without being seen or suspected and bring reliable information as soon as you can."

Harry listened and understood. He cracked the toe of the right boot against the heel of the left, glanced at the doctor respectfully but confidently and remained silent.

"It would be useful," also added the doctor, "if you got into conversation with the person and ascertained what he knows about the death of Miss Busch and whether he has any particular—the doctor laid stress upon the word—any particular information to give. You may require some money. Take this."

Harry cracked the toe a second time and proceeded on his mission without uttering a word. Like a sleuth-hound unleashed he got hot on the scent at once, his eyes eager but patient and his body tense with anxiety to succeed. Harry had in large measure the best attributes of the detective, the shrewdness of a keen observer, the quick

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penetrating eye that flashes by instinct on the weak spot in criminal handiwork but he was unaware of his power and set no value upon the greatest of gifts—natural skill. Fortunately the doctor believed in Harry's capabilities and knew he would bring definite news if possible and waited patiently for his report.

In three days the Doctor knew through Duncan that the old butler, William Shortham, was the witness whose presence was so dramatically mentioned by Mrs. Hurst.

The butler's description as an eye-witness involved the problem in fresh complications. According to William's statement he was having a most enjoyable but surreptitious smoke in the verandah outside the drawing-room, when the lights inside were suddenly lowered and the sharp report of a shot startled him. The lights flashed up again brightly and he saw Master Rial standing in the middle of the room with a revolver in his hand and the beautiful young lady stretched on the floor lifeless. Louis Gabriel stood near the window through which William was looking and Mrs. Mason leant for a moment against the wall opposite, apparently overcome by shock. Gabriel and Mrs. Mason then advanced to where Rial stood looking horrified. They spoke to him in turns, pointed at the revolver and at the corpse and appeared to be demanding an explanation of his act. He looked in a stupefied way at one and then the other, then at

the dead woman, and then at the revolver. He appeared surprised and dazed and unable to speak. They put their hands through his arms and led him away to a corner of the room where William could not see further. All this took place in a short space of time, a few seconds was William's estimate. He immediately rushed in with the other servants to render any assistance possible but it was all over with the poor young girl. They turned her gently on her back and noticed the pale stamp of death on the loveliest face they had ever seen on any person living or dead. The two maids began to weep and one cried loudly, "What a pity, what a shame to kill such a lovely young creature." Mrs. Mason ordered her to leave the room and stop her howling. Master Rial came forward with Gabriel at his side and told the servants how the accident happened; that he thought his fore-finger was on the guard instead of being on the trigger and a slight pressure discharged the weapon. William wished to proceed for the doctor, but Gabriel informed him that a quicker messenger had been already dispatched.

"Did you learn anything of the events immediately subsequent?" asked the doctor.

Duncan nodded in the affirmative and related what William had told him about Rial's forlorn appearance at breakfast next morning. The least noise, a cup or plate moved sharply, made him jump with painful, nervous alarm. Rial's eyes were bloodshot and his face of deathly colour, showing a

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night of restless agony, in which sleep had failed to relieve the spell of an unwonted horror.

During the meal Rial overlooked the butler's presence and spoke as if to some imaginative friend, at the end of the dining-room. "We had some angry words," he said. "She would not consent to marry me. What a pity! Now I am responsible for her death."

"Were those the exact words?" The doctor spoke anxiously.

"They are the words as William repeated them to me," replied Duncan. I paid special attention to that part of his story.

William it appeared was not quite clear about some muttered statement of Rial's but its purport as given to Duncan indicated that a dispute had taken place between Rial and the young lady and that in a moment of passion he killed her. That interpretation might be right or wrong, Duncan could not say, but it was evident that William kept his ears very much open for any word that fell from his master's lips.

The doctor listened patiently to the statement made by Duncan and at its close required more definite information on a few vital points.

"Did William say that Rial deliberately fired the revolver?"

"I tested him specially on that point. The flash of the shot he said was instantly followed by the flood of light in the room and Rial was

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then grasping the revolver in his hand. William thinks it was a deliberate act but that I think is an opinion and not a statement of fact."

"The law draws a marked distinction between a statement of fact and a mere expression of opinion. Did you question him about Gabriel's part in the affair?"

"Yes, minutely. Gabriel was close to the window outside which William stood and when William looked into the room Gabriel never moved."

The doctor looked grave and preoccupied. This information upset all his previous theories and corroborated the view of old Dr. Fortescue and those who believed in the report of an accident, or else it meant a deeper mystery than he felt himself capable of unravelling. Could there have been another person concerned who was concealed in the room? In the moment of darkness, he mused, much could have happened, which would escape keener and more observant eyes than those of the old butler's, who had probably been terrified by the report of firearms and was only able to recall vague impressions of the tragic scene. William might have thought that Gabriel remained near the window, Gabriel might have known William was there and wished to have evidence in his favour, and though a witness, William at his age looking through glass into a darkened room and then into a room

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suddenly lit up would form impressions that only a good memory could disentangle and place in their correct and consecutive order.

After patient reflection the doctor came to the conclusion that notwithstanding the butler's story Rial was either the dupe of Gabriel or Mrs. Mason or of both of them.

The fact that the lights in the room were lowered just as the shot was fired was plainly in the doctor's opinion a most suspicious circumstance. Who lowered them—Gabriel or Mrs. Mason? That was a question of the gravest import because if lowered by Mrs. Mason the fact at once established a conspiracy between Gabriel and herself, of which the first victim was Edith, and the second might be Rial.

Then if lowered by Gabriel, who fired the shot? What motive could Mrs. Mason have? She had only recently arrived and her natural instinct should be to protect another woman from injury, yet her conduct towards the maid, the rebuke about her howling, seemed harsh and pitiless. If Mrs. Mason fired the shot, which seemed indeed improbable but still possible, the mystery would be altogether beyond the doctor's power to unravel but these and other conflicting thoughts crossed his mind in consequence of the details given by the butler of what he saw on that fatal night.

Mowbray grew alarmed as the idea suddenly struck him that one crime might be committed

to conceal another. If Gabriel and Mrs. Mason were in league for some terrible purpose and if Rial held a dangerous secret they meant perhaps to kill him so as to prevent detection. This fear excited Mowbray to press forward with all possible haste to avert a second tragedy and to avenge the wrong done to the woman whom he had promised in the most sacred moment of his existence to love and to protect.

"William also told me that Rial gave instructions that he was not at home to anyone who called."

These words from Duncan recalled Mowbray to the necessities of the moment.

"To whom?" he asked.

"To Gabriel."

"I thought so. That plays Gabriel's game better than if he arranged it after his own most ingenious manner."

Mowbray reflected for a few moments. Then like a man who has made up his mind to act with celerity he said :

"Will you try and see Rial Greton? Tell him his life is in peril and warn him to leave Bayview House at once. It will be risky but I have confidence you may succeed."

"I will try," said Duncan, striking his toe against his heel more emphatically than he had ever done before.

CHAPTER XII

If Duncan succeeded in obtaining an interview with Rial Greton, George Mowbray believed that discovery of the whole truth would quickly follow. Much therefore depended on Harry's tact and shrewdness, but measuring his strength against a man of Gabriel's calibre was a different effort of skill from getting the better of an old butler and a gate-keeper.

Thinking over the progress so far gained the doctor felt encouraged and perplexed. He had only reached the rim of the plot, the outer circle of a network controlled by the sinister but clever brain of Gabriel but if warning could be conveyed to Rial and he obeyed it, the confession of what really happened in the room, the elucidation of the point which escaped the eyes of William the butler, should clear up the whole mystery.

Obstacles, however, stood in the way of this result which neither the doctor nor Duncan could foresee, though they anticipated great difficulties and took precautions to overcome them. It is

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not in bold daring that skill and courage and resource are shown to the best advantage. Patient attention to minute detail, the power to prepare with infinite care, to guard against surprise and be ready for the unexpected as well as for the expected, constitutes the quality which gives mastery to men in every walk of life, to the criminal in his secret haunts no less than to the General in the open field.

Louis Gabriel was one of those uncommon men with clear, keen, brilliant faculties, who had industry and energy to apply them to the success of the particular purpose he had in view; capable of good actions if necessary, but capable of desperate actions if the attempt to thwart him threatened to destroy his plans. He lacked moral ballast. He did nothing good for the sake of principle or because it was good. It simply served sometimes to assume the rôle of a beneficent man but his real nature was degenerate, selfish and unscrupulous, dominated by an exceptional mental capacity which made him one of a dangerous order of beings wherever met with or dealt with in human affairs. His gifts raised him above the baseness of petty crime because its results brought nothing commensurate with high expectations but where a big prize offered and he had a faint hope of winning, all the subtle powers of his ingenious mind were bent to the task with a thoroughness, concentration, and absorption that can only be described as marvellous.

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When he first came to Bayview he had no settled object in life. His reserved and gloomy appearance recommended him to the favour of Rial's mother whom he easily cajoled into a belief in his fitness for the position of tutor. His past, whatever it had been, escaped her penetration and he entered upon the duties with such zeal and interest that he immediately ingratiated himself with his pupil and with the family. But ere long the possibilities suggested by the weak character of Rial, the only son of rich parents, and the competence and luxury to be gained if he turned his influence to proper account, began to take hold of Gabriel's imagination, sent the blood rushing through his veins in a ferment of hope, and gradually gave birth to schemes for personal advantage. They took definite shape when Rial's father and mother died and Rial was left by directions of Mrs. Greton to the sole charge of Gabriel.

On the mastery established over the will and affections of his pupil depended the fruition of Gabriel's hopes. He cultivated Rial's tastes, catered for his prejudices, nursed his whims, flattered him, lectured him, petted, remonstrated and plotted to the one end that Rial should obey implicitly, and trust and love his tutor. The scheme worked without a hitch, prospering day by day under the ever watchful and cautious eye of its crafty originator.

Mowbray's visit to Rial at Bayview House left an impression on Gabriel's mind which excited that

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individual's ill-will against the doctor. Everything being yellow to the jaundiced eye, he saw, or fancied, the existence of a desire to pry behind the scenes, into their daily life, and for that reason formed a particular aversion to the man who had forced his visit upon them. Perhaps the subtle power which creates distrust between the open, honest nature and the taciturn, secretive nature had more to say to the antagonisms that sprung up between them at their first meeting than any other cause that could be assigned. Certain it is that Gabriel and Mowbray became enemies by reason of a natural antipathy to each other which neither could satisfactorily explain but which both knew existed the moment they exchanged looks and words at the hall-door. The instinct of antipathy is often nature's signal of danger and cannot be safely discarded by rational beings in their intercourse with their fellow-men—the dumb animals obey it. This same instinct enabled Mowbray to see that Rial was in Gabriel's power and enabled Gabriel to understand that the doctor would prove a formidable influence against him, if he allowed Rial to get into his hands. Gabriel had no fear of the doctor, no fear of anybody, but being nominally a dependant in high favour with a weak master, the intervention of a man of the doctor's strong mind, might interfere with peaceful domestic relations and he resented an intrusion that portended for him

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such an undesirable result. He felt angry too that the Doctor's manner and his high-handed demand to see Rial, should convey the idea that Rial's welfare was not in proper hands and the suspicion that Rial was not treated as he should be and had the right to be treated in his own house.

How much the doctor's visit disturbed the balance of Gabriel's thoughts may be judged from the interview which he forced upon Rial immediately after the doctor's departure.

He found Rial in a complaisant mood, resting peacefully, much the better from contact with the vigorous intellect of the doctor. A calm face and steady eye betokened relief from the delirious anxiety that harassed him before the doctor's arrival. That the doctor's visit had such a soothing effect displeased the tutor as it betrayed knowledge of dealing with him which would create in Rial's mind admiration for Mowbray's ability.

It became necessary to keep them apart.

Gabriel walked into the room wearing a wistful, lugubrious countenance which would denote great sadness but for the watchful gleam in the big searching eyes.

"You look ill," remarked Rial with some concern, for his tutor's health.

Gabriel smiled in a sickly way. Then he explained that during the night Mrs. Greton had visited his bedside several times, looking very

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disturbed and uneasy, and cautioned him to exercise the utmost care about Rial's future.

"Did she recommend me to get married. The doctor has done so." He spoke rather lightly on such a serious subject.

Gabriel drew back and bending low glowered into the upturned face of Rial.

"What!" he ejaculated. "To get married. You already forget your mother's saintly advice. You cannot get married until I select your wife. You have not come to the years of marriage."

"I know that," returned Rial submissively, "but that young doctor is a clever man and he advised me to marry a lady whom I care a great deal for."

Gabriel rose to his full height over the bed on which Rial lay and fixing a pair of stern eyes upon him declared with solemn voice:

"If you take the advice of men like Mowbray you will wreck your life and prove false to your mother's memory. Your innocent mind is good and pure but it might be easily ruined by bad counsel. Take heed of what I say, what your mother taught you, and what a gentleman must be."

Rial listened with shame-faced placidity to these words and confessed he would not think of marriage but for Mowbray's remarks.

"Then you must shun him," demanded Gabriel. "He may be talented in the practice of medicine, but if the love, the honour and hope of your mother are not to be ruined by evil suggestion you must

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refuse to consult Mowbray on your personal affairs."

Pressed so hard, Rial reluctantly submitted to the condition imposed by his tutor but in his heart cherished a kindly feeling for the man who had just done him a friendly service.

The tutor's protest had the desired effect. It did not favour his design that Rial should marry Helen Fortescue. She was a clever girl, a woman whose presence as mistress would be ruin to his hopes and plans. Without showing his hand, in discountenancing marriage he was aiming at Helen and when Rial not only renounced thoughts of matrimony but agreed to shun the doctor, Gabriel congratulated himself upon a two-fold victory.

Since the death of Edith Busch Gabriel spent more time than ever in the secret chamber which Rial told the doctor he allowed no one to enter. It was there that his true character revealed itself. No prayers or pious exercises troubled his gloomy soul. The fever of his schemes excited alert, restless movements. Immediately he entered the room and locked the door, he quickly removed his coat, opened a chest concealed behind a screen, pulled out a crowbar and other tools and disappeared with them through an excavation made in the wall at the far side. While the household believed he kept solemn and lonely vigil, this strange man was delving hard, burrowing through Bayview House and beneath it until he completed a network

of secret passages, the construction of which made him virtual master of the building. Some strong motive impelled him to the laborious and patient toil he found necessary to overcome the difficulties in his way. That motive could only be surmised from the precautions he had taken to prevent any communication with Rial Greton without his knowledge.

One afternoon Gabriel sat in his own room in deep thought. He had just left Rial, whose mind, never strong, was weakening still more under the strain of melancholy regret. The young fellow had denounced himself as the murderer of his guest. He saw her blood on his clothes, he pointed to it on the floor, he closed his eyes, but beneath his lids the red glow appeared still clear to his senses. Edith came again into his presence in the beauty and bloom of her transcendent charms; the flash, the report, the dull thud of a falling body, the momentary darkness, then the light, the corpse—all came back to his fancy, chasing shadows and horrors to his brain until he had room for no thought but the tragedy that darkened his life. Suddenly he moved to hide the revolver, to conceal the body, to remove the stains of blood; then he would pause affrighted, as if caught in a desperate crime and rush from the room with a terrific yell of pity and of fear.

Gabriel went to much pains to quiet him on these occasions of emotional outbursts, and to such

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good purpose that serious as were the fits they left no pronounced effects upon Rial's physical condition.

The tutor was in his den thinking what might happen if his pupil became insane, when a sharp rustle behind the screen startled him. He turned to ascertain the cause and found Duncan confronting him with a revolver pointed at his breast.

"Show me to your master at once," demanded Harry imperatively. "Your life will pay the penalty if you refuse. Betray me at your peril."

Gabriel stood still, remarkably quiet and cool.

"You have an unceremonious way of introducing yourself," he said with quiet sarcasm. Why did you not come to the hall-door. The passage underground is unpleasant. However, as you went to so much trouble I won't disappoint you. Come with me."

Gabriel motioned to follow him and Duncan taken off guard lowered his weapon. At that moment two strong arms were fastened on Duncan's body, the revolver taken from his grasp, and Gabriel in a rage turned and fell upon him like a famished wolf. The unfortunate intruder though powerfully built, struggled in vain against the united strength of his captors who in a trice had him lying bound and helpless at Gabriel's feet.

"People who come uninvited to this house must be prepared for the consequences," and Gabriel gave vent to a gurgling sound of scorn which froze the blood in Duncan's veins.

CHAPTER XIII

Though Mowbray waited anxiously for Duncan's report, a fortnight passed away and Duncan was still missing. What could have happened to such a shrewd fellow as Harry was? The doctor inquired at his residence to find his family alarmed and fears entertained for his safety. No doubt he had gone to Bayview House. He had expressed that intention to his sister who was taken into Harry's confidence when a mission presented any element of danger that might keep him from home for an unusual time.

Mowbray felt uneasy. Delay favoured those who wished to hush up the affair of Edith's death. They were gaining time and now they had evidently seized Harry on some pretext and were holding him a prisoner.

What was to be done? Mowbray thought of and rejected many suggestions, until at last he made up his mind to a bold course which would lead to public inquiry.

The Editor of the local paper, a "one-hoss shay,"

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which represented the power of the Press in the district, could if he desired render him valuable assistance. Mowbray repaired to the office and as the result of an interview the following startling paragraph appeared in the Evening edition:—

“For some days past rumours have been current in this town of the reported death of two inhabitants. Their disappearance is a mystery for which so far as we are aware the police have no explanation to offer. The names of the men, the date on which they were last seen, and other particulars are now in possession of the Editor of this journal who will give them to any authorised representative of the law calling at this office. If serious crime has been committed the public will not hold blameless those who should be more active and energetic in protecting the lives of our citizens.”

Half an hour after the issue of the paper containing this announcement, the Inspector of Police rushed into the office where he found the Editor in his room.

“Is this such a serious matter as you represent it?” asked the Inspector.

“It is more serious than I have represented it,” replied the Editor.

“What are the particulars?”

“Rial Greton disappeared at the time of the death of Edith Busch and Harry Duncan who went into Bayview House a fortnight ago has not since been heard of.”

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The Inspector looked amazed.

"More than that, I can tell you there is a mystery about the death of Edith Busch which the police should in the public interests endeavour to clear up."

"Who is suspected?" asked the Inspector briefly.

"The name of Rial Greton is freely mentioned."

"I know that, but the police have no evidence against him."

"Well, privately I may tell you," said the Editor, "that suspicion also attaches to Rial Greton's tutor, a man named Louis Gabriel. He has been in the family for some years but is quite unknown outside the house."

Once roused the police became very active. This fresh development made public in the press required prompt attention. They treated with suspicion all concerned in the death of Edith Busch and proceeded to act accordingly.

As the result of the conversation between the Inspector and the Editor, a warrant was issued for the arrest of Louis Gabriel.

In the last chapter we left Harry Duncan securely bound in Gabriel's room. The person who stole in through the secret passage after Harry and fell upon him unawares was a rather small but active man whom Duncan had never seen at Bayview before. The moment Duncan was secure the unknown individual who kept his face concealed, immediately disappeared leaving Harry

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a helpless prisoner alone with Gabriel. For a long time not a word or look was exchanged between them. Duncan kept his eyes on Gabriel's movements but the latter turned his back and gave no opportunity of studying his face.

"How will this adventure end?"

The question had just struck Duncan's mind when Gabriel who had evidently been occupied with the same thought turned towards the intruder and with feline step approached to within a yard of where he lay huddled up.

"You are a daring marauder," he hissed into his ear with suppressed ferocity in the words. "You come here armed, to attack defenceless people; to commit robbery, and perhaps murder. We have caught you red-handed in one of the most serious crimes known to our law and I'll see that you receive the terrible punishment you deserve."

Duncan at once understood the desperate dilemma in which he was placed. He had reckoned upon forcing a passage to Rial Greton's presence by compelling Gabriel to lead the way, but now he lay trapped at the mercy of this unscrupulous man, and the construction put upon his action appeared so plainly true that it would be impossible to escape the consequences. Penal servitude did not appear a pleasant prospect as the reward of helping a friend, but he had hopes that Gabriel would not court the exposure of a trial in which evidence of his own character and doings would

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be brought to light and in which moreover an opportunity might arise of raising the question of Edith Busch's death.

Gabriel must have come to this conclusion also, for he suddenly dropped the manner of the law-abiding citizen and pulling a handkerchief from his pocket bound it tightly over the eyes of the astonished Duncan.

"I think we can deal with you without the intervention of the police. The spider does not depute his authority to another when the fly walks into his parlour."

The hoarse, menacing laugh which accompanied these words, made Duncan writhe with a feeling of vague apprehension.

After the bandage had been firmly secured, Duncan felt the sensation of a man confined in a narrow space, though he was quite conscious that he had not stirred from the spot where he was first bound. No door opened, no lock turned, yet his senses told him that Gabriel had departed and that he was alone.

The dead, ominous silence began to rack and oppress him with vague fears of cruel and merciless treatment. There was little doubt Gabriel regarded him as a spy, notwithstanding the accusation of house-breaking, and desperate men do not hesitate to wreak a terrible vengeance upon individuals caught in the spy's degrading occupation. If he had gained access to the house by any other

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means than the secret passage Gabriel could only consider it an act of open hostility, but the discovery of the secret passage involved the safety of Gabriel's plans and he might perhaps consider that discovery as a crime which could only be atoned by Duncan's death.

A quick, stealthy tug at his bound feet gave Duncan a start which almost took his breath away.

"Get up," commanded the sinister voice of Gabriel.

Duncan obeyed with difficulty and felt relieved being once more on his feet.

The tutor whipped the bandage roughly from his face. Duncan blinked in the glare of light and then caught the eyes of Gabriel fastened upon him like those of a snake attracting its victim.

"I have an idea why you forced your way into this house. But I want you to tell me the truth. What brought you here?"

"I came with a message to Mr. Greton."

"What is it?"

"I can only tell himself. If you let me see him I will state it in your presence."

"That is a pretty excuse indeed for stealing into this house and presenting a revolver at my head. Do you think I am a fool to be humbugged by that story. You were prepared to take my life. How dare you trifle with me?"

There was a savage gleam on the face of Gabriel which boded little mercy for Duncan but that

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Gabriel's hand was withheld by some strong motive.

Like a general dealing with a crafty foe, Gabriel had endeavoured to penetrate the purpose of sending Duncan into the house. He guessed at once that the object was to communicate with Rial, but the nature of the communication baffled his deductive faculty. Quickly, however, he saw that Duncan had placed himself in his power as a criminal and if he could not induce him to confess, he could detain him in the house until it served his purpose to hand him over to the police.

"Can I see Mr. Greton?" asked Duncan, observing the tutor's hesitation.

"He refuses to see you, but I can put you up comfortably until Mr. Greton changes his mind," and Gabriel's sneering smile told Duncan that his stay in the lion's den was likely to last for some time.

When darkness fell, Duncan was conveyed to a different part of the building where he was told he would have to remain for the present. He slept little through the night and at the first streak of dawn found himself occupying a long narrow room, arched like a prison cell with a small heavily barred window on the roof to admit the light. There was no furniture but the bed, a chair and a small table on which was thrown a book on the pleasures of freedom,—a grim joke which Duncan was in no humour just then to relish. Through a small panel over the door, his food was thrust in at regular

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intervals in the stealthy way in which everything was done in that strange house.

The loss of liberty is a deprivation that quickly fastens its horrors upon the human being. Duncan tried to think, but his mind kept reverting to the oppressive fact that he was caged there like a wild animal, denied the right to move and act and speak like a man. Solid walls and a massive door held him fast within a narrow space where no sign or sound of life reached his ears. The silence and stillness of the grave were about him; a living, sentient being occupied a tomb. He paced the room, examined the walls and ceiling and door; he repeated the performance a hundred times, but at the end he was nothing nearer to contentment with his position. For days he suffered the agonising torments of this terrible solitary confinement, made still more hideous and enervating by the uncertainty as to when it would end. At night he would dream of bright blue skies, of the glorious open sea and the green fields and wake up to be mocked by reality. He often thought of trying to escape, and recalled the patient efforts of prisoners he had read of, but his jailers were more cautious than any prison officials and left no chance at his hand. Days wore on slowly in this dreadful dungeon, days of restless, unspeakable mental torture, when towards the evening of the tenth day Gabriel flung open the door with a swift movement and stepped into the room. If he were the angel of the name he could scarcely

be more welcome to the longing eyes of the prisoner. Duncan forgot the sufferings he had endured, forgot the horror, the pain, the uncertainty of his position, forgot everything in the sudden inexpressible joy that he was in the presence of a fellow-being. Gaunt, forbidding, stern as Gabriel's face appeared, it filled the craving of Duncan's famished sense for one breath of human companionship. He forgot they were enemies. He offered his hand but the scornful rejection by Gabriel threw his thoughts back once more into the deep chasm of despair.

"Mr. Gretton will set you free if you give me the message you have for him." Gabriel spoke in a harsh, almost brutal manner, suppressing the least show of human sympathy with a fellow-creature in suffering.

"Bring him here and I will deliver it," suggested Duncan appealingly.

"It is not for men in your position to make terms. Will I tell him you still refuse?"

"I am bound in honour to refuse and though I suffer, I would rather suffer than betray trust.

"You won't refuse when I come again." With these menacing words, Gabriel left him.

The police took special precautions about executing the warrant for Gabriel's arrest. They surrounded the house, as they thought, without being observed. The alarm from the gate lodge had warned Gabriel of something unusual occurring and when the Inspector went forward to demand admission, he

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was politely welcomed by Gabriel himself. The Inspector had some experience of criminals who fled at the sight of the police, but this one though forbidding in appearance, stood his ground and his manly action rather appealed to the heavy intellect of his captor.

"I arrest you on the charge of murder," he said laying his hand on Gabriel's shoulder.

"Indeed!" coolly returned Gabriel. "May I ask for particulars."

"The particulars are brief," replied the representative of the law. "Rial Greton, the owner of this house, and Harry Duncan, who is known to have entered here about a fortnight ago, are missing and the suspicion is that you have murdered them."

There was a grim attempt at a smile on the parched face of the tutor. He looked at the Inspector with cynical contempt.

"Suppose," drawled Gabriel deliberately, "I produce the two men will you withdraw the charge?"

"I must see them before I make any promise." The Inspector thought this a clever reply. He did not often say or do clever things but he felt he was guilty on this occasion.

Gabriel raised his hand as if to signal the moment agreed on and immediately Rial Greton and Harry Duncan appeared together at the end of the gallery overlooking the main hall.

"Let them come forward," ordered the Inspector.

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Rial Greton nervously and reluctantly obeyed the command, followed by Harry Duncan looking pale but no doubt elated that the period of his imprisonment had suddenly expired.

They were indentified by some of the Inspector's assistants who could scarcely refrain from smiling at the grotesque turn events had taken.

"Is your business at an end?" said Gabriel addressing the Inspector.

Duncan stepped forward and whispered something to that official who said:—

"No. My business is not done. I arrest Rial Greton for the murder of Edith Busch."

CHAPTER XIV

Helen Fortescue's appearance had for some time caused her father grave anxiety. He observed in her faded looks and pale cheeks, in her listless, self-absorbed manner and drooping figure, those evidences of a change so unusual that at length he decided to question her closely on the state of her health. To his earnest inquiries she gave no satisfactory reply, nor did she make any complaint, but his professional experience sharpened by parental solicitude forced him to conclude that if there were no physical there was mental cause for the symptoms of worry and depression so apparent.

"Helen, my dear, you require a change. Our friends the Lakely's are going to France next month. You can go with them. I will take no excuse. Your health is giving way and you must take this holiday."

This offer came by complete surprise upon Helen, who knew she could not possibly comply with her father's wish at that particular time, when a dark cloud hung over Rial Greton's life and her own.

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"I cannot go, father ; I cannot go," she said in a pleading voice.

Despair and resolution struggled in these words and compelled the sharp attention of the old man.

"Helen, my child, you will not be wilful when the change is for your good. I want to see your vigour and health restored. I want to see the old rosy blush on your cheeks and sadness banished from your young life."

He spoke as only a kind father can speak, with a heart full of love and sincerity.

Helen hesitated between duty and desire. Her father knew nothing of the uncharitable remarks spread broadcast in which her name was held up to odium with Rial Greton's and inclination urged her to suppress a confession so hurtful to his feelings, but on the other hand, who could help and console her so much as her father and would not the truth be sufficient excuse for declining to leave Bayview ?

Having come to this decision she boldly laid bare the whole facts, the bitter shame she was compelled to endure silently by reason of the harsh things said without any foundation, the unmerited insults heaped upon Rial's name and her own, and then with a sigh of relief like one who lays down a heavy burden, she begged forgiveness for the pain and humiliation she had been the innocent cause of inflicting upon him.

The explanation stirred unwonted thoughts in

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the soul of the old doctor. Emotions long sobered by habit and experience sprang into violent eruption, first at the insult to his daughter and then at the ingratitude to himself. He had devoted his life to the welfare and service of the people of Bayview since he came there forty years before, a young man in the prime of early manhood.


Helen had finished her sad recital a long time before he spoke. He bore the serpent's tooth without flinching; its poison made chaos of his hopes and happiness, blotting out the past and drawing the black deadly pall of failure over his life and labours. Bayview had wronged and insulted his daughter Helen, the daughter of the man who loved its people with all the faith of a noble and benevolent nature; wronged and insulted her without just cause when they should have shed their blood to save a hair of her head from injury. There was nothing in his daughter's conduct to forgive; not a shade of guilt or shame upon her life.

Still he sat silent. He had no desire to talk, no desire to show Helen how much he felt the shock of her words, and he kept on thinking, thinking of the baseness and treachery of the world. Here he was now towards the end of his life, broken in health, his physical and mental faculties impaired, his ceaseless vigil over the health of the town and its people, his energy, his skill, his patience, his knowledge, his arduous and dangerous operations through sleepless nights, his

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anxiety—all spent in vain, except for the money he had gained, money which could never purchase the kindness he had lavished upon and entwined about their lives as if all had been his children and none his patients.

We all like an honourable man. He stands for something noble, something great or something good in the life of a community. When we speak of him we speak with pride, if we are honoured with his acquaintance; with pleasure, whether we are acquainted with him or not. Dr. Fortescue was such a man, upright in every act, conscientious almost to a scruple, an advocate of high principle, a man wise enough to fear God, and strong enough to lash with indignant tongue the attempts of the scoffer and the fool to appear clever by denial of the faith that Christians have upheld and sanctified with their blood. There was nothing of the preacher or the hypocrite in his religious professions; he upheld as a man among other men the doctrine of Christ; he upheld it like the soldier upholds his flag, like the woman preserves her virtue, like a man defends his honour, because it is right, because it represents for humanity that high and perfect end which the unbeliever and the worldly-wise endeavour to destroy. For a time his friends doubted and smiled at his words, said he should be a minister, not a doctor, but when they found it was bed-rock sincerity, that his moral courage represented his convictions, and



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that his convictions never wavered and never permitted compromise with the vanities and vagaries of the glib modern talker who seeks to make little of stupendous deeds, they began to respect him and from respect he achieved the position of a leader in local thought, true religion gaining as much if not more by the courage of this layman than by the preaching of its appointed ministers. Like fashion in other things, so strangely constituted is the human mind, it became the fashion in the circle in which he moved to speak clean and wholesome language, and view life as the first stage in the journey to a higher state, and others who heard of this practice were affected by the good example. If much evil can be done by one bad man much good can likewise be accomplished by a person courageous enough to speak the great truths of morality and religion among his fellow-men.

The old doctor had a shrewd, grave face, a face of thought over which kindly feelings—sympathy with the sufferer, sorrow for pain—held sway. Instead of being hardened by contact with continual misery and trouble, his big heart expanded with regret that human nature is so liable to attack, his tongue, tuned to a silvery ripple, helped the patient to bear up against disease, and covered as it were with velvet the keen edge of the scalpel or the lance. His presence at the bedside of the sick at once inspired hope and his manner patient, inquiring, cautious, his actions quick and decisive

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when he had found the cause of pain made the patient hopeful in the struggle with disease.

Nature had endowed him with one of its most admirable qualities—a sound judgment. The doctor is ever face to face with a crisis in human life and if he lacks judgment, Heaven help the patient. No science offers such opportunity for error—serious, irreparable error—as the practice of medicine. The human body in travail is a storm centre in which the difficulty of fixing the point of operation is as difficult as harnessing a flash. Doctors readily cope with functional derangements but where is the cure for maladies that afflict the body as a whole, that run through the blood and disorder the brain? Scientists are but children experimenting with these diseases and all we can do is to build asylums and hospitals for the sufferers. The weak point in the mastery of medical science is that doctors can only learn from the dissection of dead bodies how to operate on living men, forgetful that the condition of the dead body and the living must be as different as life and death can make it. It is not from dead bodies they can wring the secret of curing the living, let them speak as they may about the progress of medicine. Dr. Fortescue often used his judgment against scientific formula and succeeded to the great joy and safety of the patient. This gave him a reputation for cleverness, which his courage deserved.

At last he broke the silence that followed his

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daughter's confession. He seemed to be answering his own thoughts.

"Never mind, Helen darling. I am old enough to understand that the world can be ungrateful to its greatest benefactors. The mind of man is prone to evil and notwithstanding the good done for people they resemble the unthinking animals when their appetites are whetted by scandal and calumny. Civilization and religion have not stamped out our savage instincts; they have merely covered them with the thin veneer of control which wears off the moment ill-will and malevolence are excited. The wrong you suffer is done daily to hundreds of men and women, but you, conscious of innocence and honour, can let the fiends howl in their jeering, mocking way, for you shall pass through unscathed to higher respect when truth prevails."

Helen listened to her father with patient hope and courage. What a rock of consolation he presented to her forlorn heart in this hour of its bitter agony and unrest. She had loved her father through the years that made him the hero and the guardian of her life, but he never appeared so calm and grand, so full of manly worth as now when he stood by her side, her truest friend, her trusted champion in the peril that threatened her fair fame and maidenly repute. She stooped, and with passionate affection kissed his cheek on which a tear dropped from eyes suffused with love and thanks and soulful gratitude.

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Seeing her father revert to a silent, thoughtful mood Helen withdrew quietly. When she had retired the old man sighed deeply. The attack on Helen was an attempt to dishonour him, whether deliberately intended or not. As the horror of the foul accusation took firmer hold he felt a numb sensation pass through his whole frame. At other times he would be glad to go abroad through the town and see his friends, but now he shrank from meeting any person and remained at home. He would give no opportunity to smile before his face and jeer when his back was turned.

He retired earlier than usual that evening.

Mowbray called to see Helen and tell her of the progress of the inquiries he had begun. He was about to say good-night when one of the servants rushed hurriedly into the room and exclaimed, "Master seems very ill."

Mowbray at once repaired to the old man's room and found him—dead. His heart had failed—the kind benevolent tender heart—had failed. There the old man lay like one asleep but truly dead, killed by ingratitude. The base, ignoble action of the public towards Helen had broken his heart, and the once powerful man, the once strong form that so often went forth to battle with Death now lay stiff in its cold embrace.

Over Helen's grief we must draw a veil of respectful silence while we proceed with the narration of events interrupted by this chapter.

CHAPTER XV

The news of Rial Greton's arrest spread quickly through the town, many of the inhabitants remarking that this step should in consequence of the rumours afloat have been taken long ago by the police authorities. At the same time the position of Rial and the serious nature of the charge intensified to a remarkable degree the excitement felt at such an unusual event. Little groups rushed to and fro under the influence of a morbid sensation to ascertain where Rial had been taken, whether to the police office or to the prison, and when baffled by official reticence hurried out to Bayview House, there to discover suggestions of dark and evil deeds never before associated with the place and to return convinced of the prisoner's guilt.

Mrs. Hurst's virtuous indignation at the law's delay changed to hope that the wheels of justice would now move on rapidly. She gloated over Rial's misfortune and Helen's disgrace. She laughed at their degradation. The dry dust of selfish, sullen pride had grafted upon this woman's nature

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a surface that no ray of human sympathy or pity could pierce. Centred in herself she cared not who suffered if she succeeded, who went to the bottom if she remained on top. She allied herself to respectable people in order to hurl scorn with their imprimatur; she allied herself to the mean and contemptible when their cowardly tongues spoke the words that gave pain to her enemies or pleasure to herself. And through the town at all times she walked with head erect, the living embodiment of unimpeachable respectability. Alas! we have to suffer such inflictions in a society degraded by false standards for Mrs. Hurst is morally a type of a rather numerous class.

William, the butler, lost no time in making his way to Mrs. Hurst's residence. She would he knew be anxious for full particulars and he prepared what for his powers of description was an ornate account of the scene at the time of the arrest. Rial broke down completely when the Inspector accused him of the crime. A man named Duncan who was present told the police that Rial confessed the crime. It was on that information principally the Inspector decided to take the prisoner into custody.

"You shall be lonely without your master," interposed Mrs. Hurst who was thinking of something more than what happened in the hall of Bayview House.

"Not I, ma'am, I have been dismissed by Mrs. Mason.

"On what grounds?"

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"She said I spoke outside of the secrets of the house and that it was my tongue brought on this trouble. I was paid off and told never to show my face at the house again."

Mrs. Hurst paused as she heard these words. Mrs. Mason evidently feared the butler and wished to be rid of him.

"That is treating you very sharply," she insinuated, watching the butler's face.

"It is, ma'am, but I can pay them back."

Mrs. Hurst listened with bated breath.

"If Mr. Rial is hanged they will lose their jobs too and my evidence will hang the master."

Mrs. Hurst paused to hide a feeling of satisfaction which it took all her power of self-control to suppress.

"You are then the principal witness for the Crown. If your recollection is good the case may be proved but if you give your evidence in a faltering way there will be an acquittal. I will have a position for you when the trial is over." Mrs. Hurst spoke insinuatingly.

"How do you wish the case to go, ma'am?" asked William, feeling delighted at the idea of entering Mrs. Hurst's employment.

"Tell what you saw," she said, "but be definite in your statements. For instance if you are asked did Mr. Greton deliberately discharge the revolver at the dead woman, what will you say?"

"I would have a doubt, but I think he fired deliberately and at breakfast next morning he

admitted having a quarrel with the girl."

"You must be more definite. You cannot have any doubts. You must say that he fired the shot deliberately or that he did not."

"Very well, ma'am, I can say that because I need have no doubt about it."

"I am glad your recollection is good enough to enable you to clear up the doubt."

"It is, ma'am; of course it is."

"Very well. You can enter my employment after the trial. It is probable your old master will not again require your services at this side of the river."

"What river, ma'am?"

"Oh, that's a metaphor—a figure of speech."

"That's a strong-minded woman," thought William when he had retired from Mrs. Hurst's presence.

The lady herself retained a grave look for some time and then as if she had balanced all the probabilities and weighed the result she exclaimed with satisfaction, "That is all right."

What was all right? We grieve to confess, but truth compels the admission, that to gratify her malice she dangled before this poor man's eyes what he considered a desirable reward for a departure from truth not sufficiently great to appear heinous to him but still sufficiently important before a judicial tribunal to make the vital difference between murder and accident.

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Duncan's interview with George Mowbray took place the same evening.

Luck had favoured the doctor's line of thought. The separation of Rial and Gabriel was necessary if he were to succeed in tracing the mystery of Edith's death. Ordinary inquiries had failed. Duncan's silence and absence proved that Gabriel had thwarted the attempt to gain access to Rial. In these circumstances the doctor felt justified in adopting the plan of accusing Gabriel of responsibility for the disappearance of Rial and Duncan and risking, the exposure certain to follow from the interference of the police. If Edith's death were accidental, the fact would now be established beyond all doubt and Rial's character could not suffer. If on the other hand murder had been committed the trial would disclose circumstances which would fasten suspicion on the real culprit and help Mowbray to pursue his investigations upon a tangible basis. His only misgiving was the pain it would cause to Helen Fortescue at a time when troubles were thick upon her; still it was as necessary for her sake as for Rial's to clear up the whole business, and though it seared his heart to increase her poignant grief the hope of seeing both Rial and Helen re-established in all that men and women hold dear, nerved him to carry out his purpose unflinchingly. To outwit Gabriel appeared no easy task, for that astute and uncommon individual had shown

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himself an adept in evading the meshes of the law, and preserving the appearance of innocence in every move of the game.

"You had a narrow escape," commented the doctor when Duncan told the whole story of his escapade in Bayview House.

"If it were useful to kill me I should not have escaped," he said, and Duncan shuddered at the recollection of Gabriel's demeanour. Traces of rigorous confinement were plainly written on the man's face and his expectant, wistful eyes bore the peculiar look noticeable in prisoners who regain their liberty.

"Did you observe anything you recollect as a strange incident during your incarceration?"

Duncan thought a while.

"Yes," he said. "When I made up my mind to enter the house unobserved I knew I would have to take the utmost precautions against detection. I watched the house from a safe hiding-place for two days and noticed that at a certain spot each day a man appeared who was not Gabriel and whom I never saw before about the house. I could not see his face and I feared to move lest the noise might betray my presence. This man would disappear for an hour or more through a thick shrubbery and return again. The first day I thought more of my own safety than of his movements but when he repeated the performance on the second day, and when later I saw the

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individual for an moment at a window in the upper storey, I guessed at once that an underground passage had been used for exit and entrance. I then decided to try that passage the next day and securing a revolver determined to see Rial at any risk. You know what happened. I must have been seen notwithstanding my precautions and led into a trap carefully set by Gabriel. My footprints probably disclosed that I was somewhere in hiding for I forgot to remove my boots and I often deplored that oversight during the hours I was forced to reflect on my adventure."

Mowbray sat musing. Who could this second man be? It struck him that if a person were in the house on the night of the tragedy who had not been heard of till now, it made a material difference in the case. Old Fortescue's statement that he could not identify the person who summoned him recurred to Mowbray's mind. Taken in conjunction with Duncan's story it brought to light the fact that besides Gabriel, Mrs. Mason, Rial Greton, William the butler, and the three servants, there was another who had an intimate knowledge of Edith's death.

"It is strange, very strange," murmured the doctor. "I would give a good deal to know that man and his relations with Gabriel. The butler makes no mention however of such a person being on the scene that fatal night."

"We can have him produced at the trial," suggested Duncan.

"That would be against Rial's interest," replied the doctor. "You must bear in mind that I can do nothing to endanger Rial's life or assist the Crown to convict him. I believe he is innocent but the public insists upon his guilt and feeling and prejudice are so inflamed that any suspicious feature would be used to his detriment. That is my great difficulty. I am bound by my own conscientious belief in Rial's innocence to help him but if in order to excite suspicion against Gabriel I were to tell the police that an unknown man was concerned in the case, they would call on Rial to produce him as a witness and that probably he might not be able to do. It is quite possible that this mysterious individual was in the place without Rial's knowledge or authority, as a secret agent of Gabriel's and if we made any public move to reveal his identity we would simply strengthen the hands of the prosecution."

"I am sorry I was partly instrumental in having Mr. Greton arrested."

"How is that?" The doctor turned sharply to Duncan.

"I heard him confess that he killed Miss Busch and I told the Inspector."

"My God!" exclaimed the doctor. "He is ruined. Why did you tell that? I was under the impression the arrest took place on account of public rumour which the police thought it desirable to

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appease when they found the charge against Gabriel had no foundation. The admission of his guilt known as it is to the police will be the strongest evidence against him."

"But if he killed her accidentally he is in no danger," argued Duncan.

"I see grave danger in his position," cried the doctor. The popular mind has already condemned him as a murderer. Who can tell how this state of public opinion may influence the evidence of the butler and seal Rial's fate. Your action has put Rial in jeopardy no matter how innocent he is. Poor Helen! This news will kill her."

It took all the doctor's strong power of self-restraint to control his feelings. With such evidence as Duncan's it was impossible to arrive at any conclusion but that the shot was fired by Rial Greton; and if the butler swore that the shot was fired deliberately the charge of murder would be definitely established against the unfortunate prisoner.

The bare thought of this result filled Mowbray with intense dismay. The issue now depending on the trial meant the vindication of Louis Gabriel, for a verdict of guilty would effectually shield him from suspicion of any kind. Had the doctor overreached his mark in arousing the activity of the police? The thought of the consequences likely to ensue from a well-intended effort to reach the real culprit as he believed, weighed him down with

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a sense of grave responsibility. He could not undo what had been done nor could he if a conviction took place save Rial. How could he meet Helen with the terrible truth before him that he, George Mowbray, who had intervened to save her and to vindicate Rial was responsible for the events which might culminate in a crowning disgrace and ignominious death. Not since Edith's death, when the sun of his life went out for ever, did he feel the same anguish of soul, the same depressing, irresistible sense of calamity as now when the happiness of Helen and the life of Rial were in the dread balance of uncertainty and peril.

The effect of Rial's arrest upon the minds of his tutor and Mrs. Mason may be judged from the conversation which took place after the departure of the police and their prisoner from Bayview House.

"Curse that fellow Mowbray! He has brought this trouble upon us by sending Duncan to pry into our affairs. I hate publicity and now I have to face a public examination."

"But you have nothing to fear," said Mrs. Mason.

"Well, I don't know. One never knows what is going to happen. It is the smallest, most unthought of trifle, that often trips a man."

"That's true," added Mrs. Mason, "and I too have no anxiety to appear in Court. I rather dread the ordeal but we are bound to attend."

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Mrs. Mason looked nervous.

"You seem frightened already," snapped Gabriel with a sneer.

"Don't speak to me like that." It is not the language of polite people." She tossed her head back proudly.

Gabriel laughed hoarsely, an unwonted twinkle in his sombre eyes.

"Pardon, madam, he said with mock humility. I quite forgot the deference due to your sex—I will not say to your age," and he pressed his sides to preserve himself from his own humour.

"Let us talk seriously," she insisted.

"There is nothing serious to be discussed. An accident occurred and it could not be helped, that is all.

"But the evidence?"

"Your evidence must be the same as mine."

With these words Gabriel rose abruptly and without looking at Mrs. Mason hurriedly left her presence.

CHAPTER XVI

The blow came so unexpectedly that Rial felt really terrified when the Inspector laid hands upon him. He looked around in amazement as if doubting whether it could be true that he was actually a prisoner. His questioning eyes suggested that some mistake had occurred but the officer silenced doubts: "There is no mistake; you must come with us." The situation became still more painful to the sensitive nature of this well-bred man when the polished iron handcuffs clasped viciously upon his wrists. Now indeed was his honour dimmed, his life ruined and his name ranked among the vilest and worst criminals in the community. His heart sank within him. Devoid of robust mental power, his weak mind discovered horror everywhere, in every thought associated with his present unhappy position. "Must I really go?" he pleaded with childlike simplicity as the Inspector insisted that further delay was impossible; and then finding himself leaving his home branded like Cain, he urged concealment of his person from the vulgar

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curiosity of the public. The police had no desire to add undue exposure to the discomforts and unpleasantness of a terrible predicament and took precautions to convey him unseen to the local prison whose gloomy exterior frowned darkly in the distant perspective.

Through a small door in the massive iron gate he passed into a stuffy, narrow cell where for weeks in a dim light, while the world beyond the prison walls sported in sunshine and freedom, he had to wait in utter loneliness and dejection, sometimes with tears in his sorrow-laden eyes, the arrival of the day on which he must appear in the dock before a jury of his fellow-countrymen.

It came at last.

"Put forward Rial Greton."

A prison warder steps aside and the prisoner with spasms of grief disfiguring his pallid cheeks walks to the front of the dock, a bewildered look in his nerveless, unsteady eyes as he gazed upon a crowded Court.

The Clerk in clear, distinctly audible tones formulates the dread charge.

"Rial Greton, you stand indicted that you on the 10th of June, 1896, did unlawfully kill and slay one Edith Busch against peace and statute. How say you—Guilty or not Guilty?"

The words seemed to fall on deaf ears. The prisoner in a dazed, meaningless way looked at the scene before him, at the Judge, stern and dignified

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in his robe of scarlet, at the Counsel fumbling and fussy over briefs scattered upon their table and at the motley crowd waiting with hushed expectancy for the opening act in this thrilling drama.

"Not Guilty!" In confident, incisive tones as if cutting the air, rang out the defiant reply of a keen-faced lawyer, with intellectual, mobile face, who sat below the dock and was retained for the prisoner's defence.

The issue was now knit between the prisoner and the Crown, the jury impanelled and the trial commenced.

Helen Fortescue occupied a seat beside George Mowbray in a corner which commanded a full view of the dock and witness-box. To spare her feelings and prevent needless humiliation the doctor besought Helen to remain at home, but this frail woman, delicately nurtured and refined, with the resolute will which gave to martyrs courage and resignation, insisted that she should share Rial's misfortune and agony to the bitter end. His dishevelled, hunted appearance almost startled her into a heartrending shriek. For a moment she felt giddy with intense pain, as if her limbs had been wrenched on a rack of torture, but a glimpse at the callous faces of the spectators, choked down the spasms that tore her heart with grief while she set her face with heroic firmness against any exhibition of woman's weakness.

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There in her seat but all forlorn, as much an object of pity as the prisoner, she craved like a desert traveller in great thirst for one drop of the milk of human kindness, one sign of human sympathy. She looked in vain. Upon the faces around might be read anxiety, eagerness, curiosity, indifference; upon none could she observe regret for the degradation imposed on the once honoured name of Greton. Her eye caught sight of a face that filled her with disgust and indignation. A woman of contracted brow and hardened features, gazed maliciously at Rial, in open and deadly contempt. It was Mrs. Hurst, gloating in the solemn triumph of her hatred, fearful lest any flaw in the evidence would baulk the vengeance of the law.

Like a squall shaking still waters, there came a murmur and shuffle when the prosecuting Counsel, conscious of his responsible task, rose to make his opening statement. A large man, clean-shaved, in the prime of life, with vigorous, rather leonine features, Helen trembled for Rial's life when with modulated voice, impressive, at times eloquent and forcible language, this man unfolded the case for the Crown.

"Some evil fate," he declared in subdued tones of pathetic regret, "had led a woman of remarkable beauty of person, to this peaceful and till now, law-abiding town of Bayview. A still more inexorable fate had led her to accept the hospitality

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of the prisoner and while in his house, contrary to all the principles of honour and chivalry, in violation of the sanctity of home, and all that home represents to the civilised human mind, she was foully slain by the prisoner at the bar."

Mrs. Hurst nodded her head in approval. Helen clutched Mowbray's arm to evade the terror inspired by these dreadful words. The silence in that crowded assembly fell deeper as they waited with breathless interest for the next words.

"Through the blood-stained byways of crime," said Counsel, "we can trace great tragedies to the ungovernable motives of jealousy and passion. These motives are present in this case, clear, strong and irrefutable. The jury should bear them in mind as I try to reconstruct the crime from the theory of the prosecution."

"Edith Busch was a young lady somewhat over twenty years of age when she came to Bayview. Her rare personal beauty at once attracted public attention but her history and character are unknown nor can they be traced to this moment. So far as the police have ascertained her first connection with Bayview House or its inmates dates from the time when a ball was given there to the friends of the prisoner. Among many handsome and dignified women who are the pride of this county, Miss Busch was, by unanimous consent, awarded the first place for womanly

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grace and loveliness. Nature had bestowed upon her a priceless but fatal gift—fatal ere the freshness of her young life had opened into bloom.”

“The prisoner became infatuated with her appearance, which we all acknowledge to be quite natural where a lovely and fascinating woman is concerned. I have no fault to find with him for giving way to feelings that few men have the power to control, and if like a good man he confined himself within the limits that common right and law ordain, he would not to-day occupy the unhappy position in which we find him. But in an evil moment he struck upon a cunning device by which he hoped to gain absolute control over the life and destiny of this woman. He invited her as a guest to his house; he abused an ancient and honoured privilege, the highest mark of friendship and esteem, for what? Common sense and experience of the world will suggest the answer to that question. Why should he invite a stranger to his house, a woman of whose antecedents he had no knowledge, a woman whose acquaintance he had only just made, not knowing where she had come from, or whether she was an adventuress, unless he had been overcome by an unholy desire to obtain undue power over her actions. It is no part of my business nor of yours to inquire why she accepted the invitation. Let us give credit to a dead woman, whose voice can never more be

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raised to defend herself, for pure and innocent motives, believing that she was entering the home of an honest and virtuous man."

"We judge a man's intentions by his actions. If the prisoner's intentions were upright, he should have refrained from endangering the reputation of Edith Busch by bringing her to live in his house. Those present at the ball were aware, it being common gossip amongst them, that the prisoner was in love with this girl. Was it real love or low passion? Real love shields its object, low passion brooks no delay. The jury can apply this test to the conduct of the prisoner when they come to decide upon the evidence. So far for the motive in this case.

"The next stage in this tragic story brings us to the actual scene of the crime, the room in Bayview House where the tragedy occurred. It is situated on the ground floor and has three large windows on the front or east side and two on the south. The dove-tailing of a new section of the house into an old at the time of reconstruction shut off the view of one corner of the interior from a person outside the building. I mention this because after the murder something happened in that concealed angle which I will for the present merely characterise as extremely suspicious.

"The prisoner has admitted to a witness whom I will examine, that early on the evening of the 10th June he had a quarrel with the deceased

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woman. He asked her to marry him and she refused. What then happened? That night he took a revolver hidden in his breast and in the presence of two other people shot her dead. His passion baffled and blasted by her rejection, he broods for a few hours in despair and then filled with jealous rage, he determines that rather than see her the wife of another, rather than bear the thought of losing a prize for which his soul hungered, he would take her life and suffer the consequences. This has happened before in the dark history of crime and will happen again, but your duty is to avenge the wrong and deter by the full penalty of the law the danger to life of giving way to man's bad and polluted desires.

"Night had come, the last night in this world for the unsuspecting and inoffensive guest, bringing with its deepening shadows a terrible doom upon the precious life of one of God's fair creatures. Within the room three people saw what took place, and two of them to save their master, and the master to save himself at once concoct the tale that this foul murder is a mere accident. It was an ingenious excuse, so plausibly put forward that the police for a long time accepted the story. Such a man as Rial Greton who bore a respectable name, whose family wielded great and deserved influence in the town, whose position guaranteed truth and integrity, would not be suspected of a base deed and the public believed

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the version of the occurrence given in the local newspaper. But murder will out. From the depths of the ocean and from the bowels of the earth have come forth, in scraps and trifles, the first links in a chain that reach to a fiendish hand and lead it manacled to the scaffold.

"It is not however on circumstantial incidents that we rely. We have a living witness of the crime; a witness to the cruel act and deliberate purpose of the prisoner, a witness who is not afraid to come forward and tell the whole truth. His story, plain and unvarnished, can leave no doubt whatever on the minds of a body of rational men of the nature of the deed which deprived a beautiful but unfortunate fellow-creature of her life. But should for a moment the least doubt exist on that point it is absolutely and completely removed by the prisoner's confession that by his own hand he killed Edith Busch."

A hush fell upon all at the close of this remarkable statement. The points like the figures of a financial budget were tabulated one by one until by sheer force and completeness they seemed to overwhelm the ill-fated man at the bar. The impassioned fervour of Counsel clenched the arguments with such force that everyone except Mowbray and Helen felt convinced of Rial's guilt. It seemed waste of time to proceed further. Helen's state of mind, though she was strong in her personal belief of Rial's innocence might at this

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particular moment be described as hoping against hope. Mowbray even could not conceal the unpleasant fact that his faith in the prisoner's innocence was considerably shaken. This speech upset all his theories and suspicions. Rial now appeared the guilty individual, whatever part Gabriel had played in the ghastly tragedy. So Mowbray thought. He and Helen waited the progress of the trial in doubt and trepidation, not trusting themselves to speak to each other even in whispers but silently ruminating on the stern facts that seemed to bear no other interpretation but that put upon them by Counsel.

William Shortham, the butler whom the police had no difficulty in discovering as a witness of the tragedy, was the first witness examined. He gave his age as fifty years. He had the smooth polished face and obsequious look of the respectable servant. A respectable servant of high class people is somebody in his own sphere. It is well not to mistake this fact. But like melancholy their occupations mark them for their own. William had an observant, vigilant manner wherein lurked a nervous readiness to obey a nod, a desire to jump at a twinkle as if it were the start for a hundred yards race, and pleased to be wanted or not as the temperament of his master willed. In a dining-room he was *facile princeps* but in a place given to strenuous contention, his apologetic attitude seemed painfully

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out of place. Counsel for the prisoner quietly smiled at the smirking, half-cringing creature who presented himself to the forensic scalpel. Training and self-interest cannot however always displace nature and this man so ready to discover a need and rush to supply it, had in him a stubborn vein when servile courtesy was brushed off.

Counsel for the prosecution seeing the weakness of his main prop, acted the part of the good nurse who has to soothe a wayward child. He took the witness metaphorically by the hand and led him gently into the danger zone, satisfied that when he had planted him there fate should decide whether or not he should win the battle.

CHAPTER XVII

William looked distrustfully this way and that, not sure of his ground, not sure of himself, not sure of anything in that strange atmosphere.

"You remember the night of this lady's unhappy death?"

"Yes," he answered meekly.

"Where were you at the time?"

"Outside the house."

"What were you doing?"

"Smoking."

"Is that a usual practice with butlers?" asked the Judge amidst a titter in Court.

The Bar smiled judiciously at the joke.

"You had a good opportunity of seeing what occurred within?"

"Yes, sir; I saw all that happened."

"Who came into the room first on that evening?"

"Gabriel came first and he was immediately followed by Mrs. Mason. Then after a short lapse Miss Busch walked in and she was followed by the prisoner."

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"Did you notice anything peculiar about the prisoner?"

"He looked like a man who had something on his mind."

"Did he speak to any of the parties whose names you have mentioned?"

"No."

"What happened when he came in?"

"The room became darkened for a second and I heard the report of a shot. It caused a terrific noise. When the lights were turned on again Mr. Rial was standing with a revolver in his hand pointed towards the lady who was lying dead on the floor."

"How far apart were they?"

"About four feet."

"Had he the revolver grasped in his hand?"

"Yes, firmly."

"Did Miss Busch speak to anyone from the time she entered the room until you heard the shot?"

"Not as far as I could hear. It all happened in a few seconds."

"What next took place?"

"Gabriel and Mrs. Mason took hold of the prisoner and accused him of the crime and then the three retired to the angle where I lost sight of them."

"You have no doubt about the person who fired the shot?"

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"None whatever. The prisoner killed the lady."

"Do you remember serving breakfast to the prisoner the following morning?"

"I do, distinctly."

"What happened at that time?"

"The prisoner said he asked the lady to marry him and she refused and that he had killed her."

This evidence created a deep impression on the minds of all present. It seemed to lay bare the motive and contained the confession that left no doubt about the real culprit.

"Anything else?" queried Counsel.

"There was nothing more said, but the prisoner was dreadfully agitated and gave instructions that he was not at home to anyone who called."

"Did you know Miss Busch before she came to live in Bayview House?"

"No. I never saw her until the night of the ball."

"How long had she been a guest before her death?"

"About two weeks."

"Did you hear any quarrel between herself and the prisoner during that time?"

"On one occasion I heard words between the lady and some other person, but whether that person was the prisoner I cannot say. I heard her distinctly say that she declined to entertain some proposal made to her and would rather forfeit her life than do so."

"Did you hear what the proposal was?"

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"No. She was very angry and indignant. She was in a room where I had no business to enter and I could not see to whom her words were addressed."

"Did you make an effort to see who it was?"

"I did, but Mr. Gabriel came on the scene and I lost the chance."

The direct examination having concluded, the prisoner's Counsel rose to cross-examine the witness. William shrugged his shoulders and pulled himself together for a tussle with a famous lawyer.

"You have the details of this story by heart—you have told it as a child speaks a lesson?"

"I told what happened."

"Have you told it as it happened or as it suits you to speak?"

"As it happened."

"How was the room lit?"

"By electric light."

"How was it darkened?"

"I cannot tell."

"Don't you know that what happened during that period of darkness is the material part of this case. You heard nothing but the shot?"

"No."

"Will you swear that the shot was not accidentally fired?"

"I cannot tell what happened in the darkness. I swear to what I saw. I can't swear to anything else."

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"Can you say who turned off the light?"

"I saw nobody do it. It might have been an accident."

"Quite so; quite so," said Counsel. "That is my opinion. "And," he continued, "the whole affair might have been an accident so far as you know about what actually took place while the room was in darkness?"

"I told you what I saw."

"Answer my question."

"Well, yes."

"Then what you saw might have been the result of the accident, not the evidence of a crime."

"Mr. Rial had the revolver in his hand pointed at the woman."

"That is not an answer to my question. You must answer me."

"It might have been the result of an accident, but I don't believe it."

"That is for the jury. We don't want your belief."

"About this alleged confession. You admit the prisoner was disturbed by the death of this lady. Do you think if he had deliberately killed her or had such a cruel disposition he would commence to blab like a baby in your presence?"

"I cannot say; he made the statement I swore to."

"You have led the jury to infer that on one occasion the deceased said distinctly that she would

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rather forfeit life than entertain the proposition of a person you believe to be the prisoner. Why did you not make sure it was prisoner?"

"The door was locked."

"And you were playing the part of spy and eavesdropper?"

The witness nodded his head.

"Do you think it creditable that you a trusted servant, who was expected to be faithful to your master and to his interests, should be caught in a disgraceful act of that kind?"

"I felt there was some strange things happening and I wanted to find out."

"Was that for mere curiosity or for a more sinister purpose?"

"Partly curiosity." Something within urged me on to listen to whatever I could hear."

"Have you no better explanation?"

"No."

"Have you any ill-feeling against your master?"

"None whatever."

"Are you still in his service?"

"No. I was discharged after his arrest."

"By whom?"

"By Mrs. Mason. She told me I had spoken outside about the secrets of the house and that my services were no longer required."

The Judge looked sharply at the witness to ascertain what significance might be attached to this statement in its relation to the whole case.

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Harry Duncan, the next witness put forward, heard the prisoner declare that he killed Edith Busch and witness told the police.

The circumstances under which Duncan came to be in the house did not transpire and the case for the Crown closed.

Counsel for the prisoner immediately arose to address the jury for the defence.

"The gravity of the charge," he said, "could not be exaggerated but it was plain to demonstration that the Crown had failed to prove the capital offence and the jury should, as in conscience bound, give the prisoner the benefit of the doubt. The evidence traced the commission of the deed to the hand of the prisoner, but that evidence was not inconsistent with the plea that the unhappy affair was the result of accident. The prisoner's statement that he killed the girl would not establish a charge of murder against him. His learned friend had exhausted the acumen of an expert intelligence in his endeavour to marshal the damning points against the unfortunate prisoner at the Bar. Strangely enough, as often happened in the case of innocent persons, appearances were decidedly favourable to the contention of the Crown. But that fact constituted the danger that, with every semblance of fair play, a gross miscarriage of justice might take place. The theory of the prosecution could not be mistaken and if established beyond reasonable doubt, the prisoner deserved condemnation.

"I am not here to excuse crime," declared Counsel, "but I am here to protect an innocent man in peril of his life and to prevent a greater crime than that with which the prisoner is charged.

"It will be proved to your satisfaction that though Edith Busch was a guest in Bayview House she was not invited there by the prisoner but by another individual whose presence guaranteed inviolability of her person and immunity from attack of any kind contrary to hospitality and friendship. What then becomes of the whole elaborate superstructure based on the allegation that she was lured into the place to become the victim of lustful aggression and design? She was not a lone woman in the house; she was under the care and protection of a lady of high and estimable character who will be called to give evidence. The testimony of the butler that he overheard Miss Busch declare with indignation that rather than agree to some indefinite proposition of the real nature of which there is no evidence, she would forfeit her life, must be rejected as of no weight whatever in the absence of clear and conclusive proof that Rial Greton was the man to whom the protest was addressed. The jury would have no right to infer he was the man until the Crown proved that no other person but the prisoner could have been there at the time and the prosecution had not made good that vital fact in the case. I submit the nature of the statement is not clear and evidence of the presence of the prisoner is entirely

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incomplete and unsatisfactory. The prosecution has suggested that the explanation of an accident having occurred is a concoction of the tutor and Mrs. Mason, to save their master, agreed to by the master to save himself, but against that I may assert with equal force, that this story of a quarrel between Edith Busch and presumably Rail Greton is the concoction of a dismissed servant to fasten a heinous crime upon his former master. By his own admission the butler stands revealed as a low, despicable spy. He was caught listening at a key-hole. Could you upon the evidence of such a creature, a wicked, evil-disposed underling, who crept stealthily from room to room in order to pry upon the conversation of the inmates, could you, upon his evidence, hang a dog? It would be an evil day for society and the safety of the subject if the law encouraged worthless and contemptible characters like this butler to swear away the lives and liberties of innocent men. There should be some corroboration of the evidence of a witness discredited by his own disreputable conduct.

“Some evil-minded persons have striven, successfully I am sorry to say, to raise this matter from the level of ordinary and unforeseen accidents, to the region of a mysterious murder. The motive put forward by the prosecution is not proved against the prisoner. They charge him with adopting a cunning device to obtain control of the life and destiny of this girl. This suggestion will excite the ridicule of all who know Rial Greton to be a young

man of poor intellect. No doubt he is a gentleman, a man of fine feelings, a man trained in religious surroundings, but the idea that he could plan deliberate murder is as far from truth as right is from wrong; and so terrible to him is the thought of shedding blood that since the date of this distressing accident in his house, he has suffered the horrors of a person really guilty of deliberate crime.

"The truth is this. He loved Edith Busch passionately from the first moment he laid eyes upon her. It was pure, honourable love. He hoped to make her his wife but she refused to accept his offer of marriage and they parted. There was no quarrel in the way sworn to by the butler. The prisoner never quarrelled with Edith Busch nor did any interview take place at which she angrily spurned a proposition from him. That portion of the evidence so far as the prisoner is concerned, is pure imagination or invention, unless it relates to what happened between her and some person other than Rial Greton. Who that other party is it is not my province to inquire but before the Crown asks you to convict they should have made that point perfectly clear and unmistakable.

"The report published in the paper is the correct version of what occurred. It is already known to you so I need not trouble with a repetition. I appeal to you to deal justly with the prisoner as you would wish to be judged yourselves. Public feeling has like mountain gorse been maliciously

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set on fire against him, that fire is raging round him even in this crowded Court, it has scorched the hearts and intellects of fair-minded people who speak of the prisoner's guilt as already established; but you are the jury in this question of life and death, sworn to deal fairly between the prisoner and the Crown, sworn to do justice though the heavens should fall, and I call upon you in the name of right and conscience and honour to say that this dreadful charge of murder has not been proved and that you acquit the prisoner."

The cross-examination of the butler and the speech of Counsel restored Helen's hopes, and Mowbray's suspicions rushed back upon him with greater force than ever.

The eyes of all in Court turned upon the face of Louis Gabriel as that individual answered his name. The usual scowl on his features hardened into contemptuous indifference. He was a rebel by nature in arms against the world at that moment. He defied everyone and everything and towering from the witness-box over the Court suggested the prophet of ill-omen from whose malign gaze men turned away in loathing and fear.

Counsel for the prosecution applied for the removal from Court of any witness for the defence except Gabriel.

After protest from the prisoner's advocate the judge made the order and Mrs. Mason in a state of much alarm was shown to a waiting-room outside.

CHAPTER XVIII

The unexpected separation of Gabriel and Mrs. Mason was not anticipated by either of them. Gabriel waited patiently until Mrs. Mason disappeared and then related in reply to Counsel what took place on the night of Edith's death. His story tallied almost word for word with the statement in the newspaper.

"Are you the person who invited Edith Busch to Bayview House?" asked Counsel for the prosecution in opening his cross-examination.

"No, sir. I did not invite her but she was invited by Mrs. Mason with my consent."

"Who is Mrs. Mason?"

"A lady."

"Are there no further interesting particulars about her?"

"She can supply them herself. I know she is a lady. I am satisfied with that fact."

"Lawyers are not so easily pleased. However I need not seek second-hand information when I can get it from the lady herself. Do you know anything of Edith Busch?"

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"Nothing whatever. Mrs. Mason spoke a good deal about her beauty and I agreed with Mrs. Mason when I saw the young lady."

"What was the routine of your daily life during Miss Busch's stay."

"She remained with Mrs. Mason the greater portion of the time. I saw very little of her company nor of anybody else's company for I prefer to be alone except when required by Mr. Greton."

"Can you tell me if Miss Busch and your master were frequently together."

"They were. He was more anxious for her company than she was for his. He appeared foolishly attached to her, following her here and there at all times and probably making himself disagreeable by his persistent and unreasoning attentions."

"Are you aware of any quarrel having occurred between them?"

"I remember catching the butler at the door when he alleges that he overheard a quarrel between Miss Busch and another person. I know that at that time the prisoner was in his own room and could not be the person to whom the lady was speaking.

This evidence created a deep sensation. That was the person Mowbray would be glad to lay hands upon if Gabriel was speaking the truth, which he doubted.

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"Who was the person?" asked Counsel.

"I cannot tell."

"Is it that you will not tell?"

"No, I hurried off at the time and the incident made no impression on my mind until I heard it recalled in Court by the butler."

"Suppose the prisoner and the deceased lady quarrelled early in the evening could he under the pretence of accident shoot her deliberately?"

"I do not think he is clever enough to carry through an arrangement of that kind. Besides, he is a perfectly harmless and innocent youth who has grown up without craft or vice and who would rush far off from the thought or intention of evil."

"What are your relations with him?"

"I have been his tutor and am still engaged in that capacity though my duties are really those of companion and guardian since his parents' death.

"You teach him nothing now?" This question was put suggestively.

"I teach him nothing wrong, and if you insinuate that I taught him anything about crime you are mistaken."

"Your indignation is premature. Have you any interest in giving evidence in his defence?"

"No interest but that of truth and justice. I know he is innocent and I am here to help him to vindicate himself."

"Could a quarrel have taken place between this man and Edith Busch unknown to you?"

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"I don't think so."

"Were you not fond of being alone according to your own statement and how could you tell what happened in other parts of the house or grounds?"

"I would have heard any loud and excited language."

"But people could quarrel without using loud and excited language."

"I never heard it."

"But it could happen?"

"Possibly."

"It was hard to drag that answer from you but we have it now that a quarrel could have occurred without your knowledge. Now tell me is it not just as probable that the prisoner, stung by the refusal to marry him, determined that she should never marry another?"

"No. I do not think that at all probable because he bound himself to consult me about his marriage."

"But he did not consult you when he proposed to this girl?"

"He was infatuated."

"And might he not be infuriated when the infatuation failed?"

"More likely he got sick."

"Did he get sick?"

"I think so."

"Then why did he come to the drawing-room that night with a revolver—this sick man—and pretend to be explaining its mechanism to his victim?"

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"He was not ill enough to remain in his room, but he looked pale and excited and probably to a state of nervous tension was due the accident. If he had been in his usual health no accident would have occurred."

"That is the best face you can put upon the transaction. The theory of the prosecution agrees with your evidence that the prisoner looked pale and nervous, but they attribute it to his jealous resolution to kill the woman who had rejected his offer of marriage and not to a harmless purpose to explain the mechanism of a dangerous weapon. Why should she wish to know how a revolver was fired?"

"It was a whim on the prisoner's part. He wanted some pretext for renewing conversation with her and thought perhaps to excite her curiosity by producing the revolver."

"He brought the revolver with him to the room."

"Yes, that's my recollection."

"Are you not quite sure?"

"Well, I am."

"Why did you say it was your recollection?"

"I am anxious to be accurate."

"Who came into the room first on that night?"

"Mrs. Mason."

"Are you quite certain?"

"I am, because I spoke to her in the hall as she passed in and I followed her."

"What happened in the angle which William the

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butler says is cut off from the other portion of the room."

"It is not cut off. It is in the room but not visible to a person looking through the window."

"You want to be very careful. Tell me what happened there?"

"Mrs. Mason and I brought Mr. Gretton there to sympathise with him and help to calm his mind, for he was most excited and required consolation."

"Was that all?"

"We explained that he was not responsible for an accident and the best course to adopt was to explain what really occurred and no blame could attach to him."

"Who suggested that explanation?"

"I did. There was no reason for secrecy, accidents will happen."

"Not on purpose. Is your explanation of an accident consistent with the commission of a grievous crime?"

"It is consistent, but no grievous crime was committed. I would be no party to shielding a man if he committed a crime."

"Allow me to say we have only your word for that."

"I am on my oath."

"Very well. You swear that no crime was committed. Is everything you have sworn here as true as that?"

"It is. Everything I have sworn is quite true."

"Let me ask you one more question. Were the

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lights turned off that night for the purpose of allowing the prisoner to murder this woman unseen by mortal eye ? ”

“ The lights were not turned off. Some derangement causing momentary darkness occurred. The discharge of the revolver at that particular time was a coincidence and I cannot explain coincidences, they have often baffled human skill.”

“ Criminals and coincidences share that honour. I have done with you.”

This severe duel between the Counsel and Gabriel excited the keenest attention of the whole Court. The self-possession of the witness set at nought the most careful traps laid to discredit his direct evidence. His coolness disconcerted a well-planned attack and searching personal scrutiny, and he emerged from the ordeal praised for his marked ability as an adroit and clever man. The fierce look on his face in no way relaxed when he left the witness stand and took a seat in the body of the Court.

If the judge and jury could detect on the face the thin line between truth and falsehood, their duty would involve little trouble but when they have to deal with a man of calm countenance and impassive manner who speaks without hesitation and with real or apparent candour they must speculate and in this speculation justice is not always vindicated. Gabriel's cross-examination had left judge and jury in the speculative mood. If

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he told the truth they could not convict but his inscrutable and uncouth appearance suggested thoughts of a man who could be thoroughly unscrupulous and they allowed this element of doubt to assail their minds.

A common cause softens asperity of feeling between men suspicious of each other. Mowbray strangely enough began to feel sympathy with Gabriel because of the service rendered to Rial Greton but could not feel convinced that he told the truth and retained as strongly as ever the belief that another and far different explanation of Edith's death lay behind all this ingenious masquerade in Court.

Mrs. Hurst, it must be remarked, looked disappointed for the first time since the trial began. She feared the evidence of Gabriel had been of the greatest assistance to the prisoner. Poor Helen with dim eyes, and face of careworn anticipation waited for some light to break through the darkness that enveloped her. It seemed hopeless to maintain against overwhelming proof the innocence of the man she loved, and yet with her knowledge of his mind and character she would not consent to the universal opinion that he killed Edith even by accident.

The fact that they had reached the crucial stage of this interesting drama, impressed itself with a curious thrill upon everybody present when Counsel for the prisoner called the name of Mrs. Charlotte Mason.

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That lady came forward with a reluctant air which was charitably attributed to feminine reserve and weakness; signs of much nervous fear betrayed themselves in twitching lips, and anxious, unsettled look. Her hand shook as she took the book to be sworn and her face went deadly white when the judge looked steadily into her troubled eyes. Mowbray alone saw the savage glance of disapproval shot at Mrs. Mason by Gabriel for this painful exhibition of physical terror. What did that mean? The vague fear seized him that they were on the point of important developments in the case. He held his breath half in horror at the idea that Rial Greton's fate was bound up with the words this woman would now utter.

Her story corroborated Gabriel's account of the main facts. It was so near a repetition word for word, that the judge looked doubtful about its veracity but remained silent. Counsel for the prisoner tried to conceal his disappointment and the prosecuting lawyer nodded in a knowing way at the jury. The public watched these significant antics, as they might follow the principal actors in a play, and drew their own conclusions. Mrs. Mason saw she was suspected of something which perhaps she had reason to fear and became terribly confused. So far however the witness had only excited doubt about the value of her evidence. If she adhered to her statements throughout, comment might be justified afterwards

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in submitting the evidence to the consideration of the jury and such comment would considerably affect but could not altogether destroy her credibility. The jury had the right to believe that a nervous woman would not remember all that occurred unless she learned the story by heart and this interpretation could be advanced with as much probability as the harsher view that she was merely reciting a pre-arranged account of the occurrence in Bayview House.

Mrs. Mason and Gabriel should give the same evidence if they were to save Rial but unaware of the tactics frequently necessary to confound witnesses coming into Court with set evidence they left out of their calculations the move made by the Crown Counsel. It flashed at once upon Gabriel that a fatal mistake had been made in not going carefully through the evidence they were to give and there in the witness-box in a moment that cool, calculating and fertile brain had to plan the course that would promise the least difference between his story and Mrs. Mason's. He knew Mrs. Mason had the details of the newspaper account committed to memory and he decided to follow those himself as closely as possible. She would naturally fall back on the same particulars as they were uppermost in her mind, when her turn came, and chance favoured this ingenious theory.

While waiting to be called Mrs. Mason endured

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the full cycle of agonising anticipation. Had she remained in Court she could easily fall into agreement with Gabriel's testimony but that opportunity had been lost and she was assailed with fear as to how the whole proceedings would now end. Any serious slip between Gabriel's evidence and her own, meant that neither of them would be believed and would also prove disastrous to the prisoner. She shuddered many times, overcome by the violence of imaginative horrors until from morbidly dwelling upon the subject, she lost complete control of her feelings and walked into Court in a wretched and desponding condition. She began to recover self-control as her direct examination proceeded, conscious that a host of interested and inquiring eyes were fastened upon her, some people in strained and strange attitudes, others keenly attentive and all eagerly intent and she made a supreme effort to rise equal to the occasion and say nothing that would endanger the interests of the prisoner.

How she fared in this resolution the searching cross-examination to which she was subjected will speedily disclose.

CHAPTER XIX

Rial Greton cowered half stealthily behind the bars of the dock. If he glanced furtively at judge or jury or witness he immediately withdrew his gaze as if caught in some felonious act. He whispered occasionally to the warder in such weak, faltering voice that the warder bent almost in two to catch the words; then the prisoner would relapse into an abject condition of depression and remain sunk for a considerable period in a state of dejected self-absorption which should but did not excite pity in those who once respected his name and family. Memory brought some incident to his recollection which aroused him to a lively interest in Mrs. Mason's evidence for he followed her remarks with particular attention and a change came over his whole demeanour. He adopted the eager attitude of a man who expects something to be said which will relieve him from a terrible position.

"It is a woman's privilege to be always curious but it is a lawyer's privilege to be sometimes

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curious about a woman," said Counsel as he rose to commence his cross-examination. "In what capacity were you engaged?" he asked.

"As hostess and housekeeper, to supply the place of a mother to the prisoner. I was qualified to be his hostess for my grandmother was the grand-daughter of the third son of a baronet." Witness said this with considerable pride and emphasis.

"I think that quite establishes your claim to recognition," said the judge with the least shade of irony. "We will get on very much better now that so much has come to light."

A quiet, smile broke over his Lordship's face and rippled along the faces around that thought it judicious to imitate his lordship's example or felt a sense of humour tickled by the extravagant aristocracy of the witness.

"Notwithstanding your claim we must know something more about you." Counsel spoke rather bluntly.

Mrs. Mason gave a haughty glance in which she resented the impertinence of the question.

"Your dignity will not suffer by telling the Court who you are. Nobody in this town knows you," said Counsel persistently.

"I came here a stranger," she said, "with credentials from a man well known and if you have any desire you can examine the credentials for yourself. I am not usually treated with disrespect."

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"In a Court of Justice you must be prepared for apparent rudeness," said Counsel, "we do not conduct proceedings in drawing-room form. We treat witnesses as human beings with the faults and frailties of our nature. You must understand that in regard to my questions. Now tell me why you invited Miss Busch to the prisoner's house?"

"I knew Edith Busch previously."

"Was she a friend of yours?"

"Yes, a very great friend of mine."

"Had you the prisoner's suggestion or authority for inviting her?"

"No. I did not think it necessary. Louis Gabriel, whom I understood to be his adviser and guardian, agreed to the invitation and I did not think Mr. Greton's formal consent was required. I saw at the ball that he was deeply interested in the young lady and I had hopes the feeling would ripen into affection."

"Then you had some design in asking this girl to the house?"

"I had no bad design."

"Will you say you had a good design?"

Witness smiled faintly. "It is probable," she admitted.

"Where did Miss Busch come from?"

"She was the daughter of a German landowner who got into trouble for his socialistic doctrines and had to emigrate to America to evade arrest and ruin."

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"When did you make her acquaintance?"

"About six years ago when she was at school in Belgium, whither her parents had sent her to be as near her native land as possible. I happened to be on a visit with some friends at whose house I met Edith, then a beautiful girl, and I became deeply interested in her. I met her frequently afterwards and we became intimate friends. When I returned to England we corresponded regularly and twelve months ago at my request she came to London with the intention of completing her studies as an artist."

"Did her artistic inclinations lead her to Bay-view?"

"I told her I was coming to live here and she expressed a wish to come and see me."

"You seemed to be a guardian over her interests. Gabriel was a guardian over Rial Greton and both of you believed that an opportunity offered to bring your wards together. Is that correct?"

"Circumstances led us to take that view," replied the witness guardedly.

"What were the circumstances?"

"They were both young. Mr. Greton seemed an eligible husband and Edith was fit by birth and education and by her great charms of person and manner to adorn the highest home in the land."

"Had she any dowry?"

"None but the dowry given her by nature and that was more than riches could purchase."

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"Mr. Greton would supply the wealth?"

"I believed so."

"Did you ever give Miss Busch any hint of the thoughts in your mind about her future before or after you invited her to Bayview House?"

"No. I thought it quite sufficient to bring the prisoner and herself together, to let them see as much as possible of each other and then let love and fate decide the rest."

"Fate decided in an unexpected manner?"

"It did, unfortunately."

"As her best friend you have a keen recollection of the details of that terrible fate?"

"Yes," witness answered in a low voice and appeared distressed.

"I do not wish to add to your affliction, but the jury require full light thrown upon the occurrence. Were you the first person who entered the drawing-room before the shot was fired?"

"No. Miss Busch was the first to enter and then the prisoner." Gabriel and I came afterwards."

"You are quite sure about that?"

"Quite sure."

"Were Edith and the prisoner on good terms?"

"I thought so. They were talking in very friendly tones while he held the revolver in his hand and was telling her how to use it. He said there were reports of burglars being seen in the

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district and residents would have to protect themselves."

"All that happened?"

"Yes."

"There is no mistake about it?"

"None whatever. I was there the whole time."

"My lord, these replies of the witness deserve special attention," observed Counsel.

"The witness is in your hands," replied the judge shortly.

Counsel interpreted this remark as permission to proceed in a more vigorous style. He dropped his inquiring and seductive manner and suddenly became aggressive.

"Which of you came to Bayview first—you or Edith Busch?" demanded the prosecutor in a voice that startled Mrs. Mason.

"I arrived here about a week before she came."

"What was the date of your arrival?"

"The 21st May."

"Did you write to her after you had settled down here that she should come as there was a young, unmarried and wealthy man in the house and you thought him an excellent catch?"

"Your question is an insult."

"Take it as you like but answer the question."

"I never wrote in such terms. I told her the town was a pretty one near the sea, with pleasant surroundings and I was very comfortable and happy

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and I would make a pleasant holiday for her during her stay."

"Tell me, Mrs. Mason, is that story as big an invention as other things you have mentioned?"

The witness looked surprised and a confused blush overspread her face. Counsel had made up his mind that Mrs. Mason was lying deliberately and he determined to make her conduct evident to everyone.

"You surprise me, sir."

"Do I indeed? Well I shall surprise you a great deal more. Is it a fact that to your knowledge Edith Busch was a week in Bayview before your arrival."

"Not at all. You are quite mistaken. I need not write if she were in Bayview."

"Is the truth this, that when you succeeded in securing the appointment as hostess and house-keeper, you sent on Edith Busch with instructions that she was not to make herself known to anyone in the town until you came and then you would make her acquaintance accidentally as it were and invite her to the house?"

"Why should I do that?"

"I wish I knew. It might explain your conduct and designs much better than I understand them at present."

"I tell you she came to Bayview after I did and I think you ought to be satisfied with my answer."

"I have reason not to be. You knew the nature

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of the appointment you were coming to fill. You knew you were coming to the house of a wealthy young man with no relatives living and you admit you had no bad designs."

"That is not correct. I knew I had to take charge of the house of a single gentleman but what his position was or his wealth I had no idea."

"You give me that answer to show that you could have no motive in sending Edith Busch before you?"

"It shows that I am not such a designing person as you wish to make out."

"But if Edith Busch arrived here before you came could she have any motive of which you were not aware?"

"No."

"Then if she came before you, you would know the motive?"

"I would."

A large book like a commercial ledger was here produced. It was the hotel register and Counsel read as follows: Name, Edith Busch, date of arrival May 14th. How do you explain that entry made by the dead woman at a time when she could have no particular purpose in making it. You say you arrived before Edith Busch and you give the date as May 21st. You were quite positive about that. This entry shows that she was a week in Bayview before you arrived. Now tell me what motive she

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had in coming here; not her own motive, but your motive in sending her."

The witness looked completely puzzled by this discovery.

"I think," she said after a confused pause, "Edith Busch arrived on the 24th May and not the 14th. It is easy to mistake one date for the other. However if she arrived on the 14th May I must have arrived on the 7th. I have probably forgotten the correct dates though I thought I remembered such things very well."

"That explanation will not get you out of this difficulty. I have examined the tickets taken up at Bayview Railway Station for the month of May and you were the only passenger from London on the 21st May. Now I think I have established pretty plainly that your memory is accurate as to dates but very inaccurate as to facts. What, I repeat, was your motive in sending Edith Busch to Bayview a week before yourself?"

"I was not aware she was here before me."

"You swear that as well as you have sworn everything else?"

"Yes. I wrote to her to come and if I believed she were here I would not write."

"Will you swear you did not send her with the intention of having her lured into the prisoner's house?"

"I will. I loved her too well to put her in any danger of being wronged."

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"You have said the prisoner was not consulted about her invitation. Is it not an extraordinary thing, if true, that the owner of a house should have no voice in the selection of his guests, particularly a guest remarkable for her beauty?"

"It may seem extraordinary but you must remember that I had special rights and I merely exercised them in this case."

"You brought a friend without your master's sanction."

"I knew I should have his sanction for bringing a friend who was of his own class."

"Did he give you that privilege whenever you chose?"

"He did not specifically say so but he expressed confidence that I would act with propriety and discretion."

"Suppose it was insinuated that the prisoner lured Edith Busch into his house at your instigation, would that be true?"

"Absolutely untrue and a most unjust accusation against the prisoner."

"Did you as the friend of Edith Busch on the night of her death accuse the prisoner of having killed her?"

"I accused him of killing her when excited by seeing her dead."

The judge made a hurried note of this question and answer. Counsel gave his lordship time to record the words fully. The answer given by

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the witness shed fresh light on the scene in the drawing-room. It contradicted Gabriel's description of what happened and convinced Counsel that the evidence for the defence was a mixture of fact and falsehood which was now no longer likely to confuse and mislead the jury.

"What did you say in your excited state?" asked Counsel.

"I told him he had killed my dearest friend and I should have some satisfaction."

"What did you mean by satisfaction?"

"That he should account for the killing of her."

"Did you not know it was an accident and that a person is not criminally liable for accident in such a case?"

"I forgot at the moment all about its being an accident. I saw her dead and assumed he acted unlawfully. I was in a desperate state of mind at the time."

"Who brought you to your senses?"

"Gabriel told me I was hysterical and that I would cause trouble if I persisted in charging the prisoner with killing Edith."

"Then you agreed to the plan representing it an accident?"

"There was no plan. It was the simple truth."

At the conclusion of the cross-examination, the prisoner's Counsel addressed the jury dwelling on the weakness and improbability of the Crown

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case and Counsel for the prosecution retorted by commenting upon the contradictions and damning admissions of the witnesses for the defence.

"They have not differed on the material facts of the case," argued the Counsel for the prisoner.

"Their attempts to shield the prisoner by false evidence is manifest to the whole Court," contended the prosecuting Counsel. Both sides having closed the judge commenced his address to the jury.

CHAPTER XX

His lordship began his speech by reminding the jury of the grave responsibility placed upon them and the necessity in the interests of justice and for the protection of society of doing their duty fearlessly, but conscientiously and impartially.


"This is a strange case—I might say a mysterious case in some respects," continued his lordship, "but if you apply your experience and common sense to the evidence you can have no hesitation in coming to a conclusion. We have here a curious instance of circumstantial confusion. In many cases the Crown must depend on facts proved by a well-connected chain of circumstances but in this case the actual deed was witnessed by three people, upon one of whom the prosecution depends and upon two of whom the defence rests. In point of numbers therefore the advantage is with the prisoner.

"Let us for the moment before we discuss the merits of the evidence consider a general question suggested by the whole case: What induced the

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prisoner to bring a loaded revolver into a drawing-room where the inmates were assembled for recreation and amusement? There is a suggestion that burglars were in the district but surely burglars would not be likely to attack a house at such a time when the people were up and about and the place alight. There was no necessity to have a revolver loaded and if the prisoner wished to explain the process of loading why not bring the revolver unloaded and minimise the risk of fiddling with those deadly weapons? What then is the true explanation, the natural, common-sense explanation, of the circumstance that a man brings a loaded revolver into a drawing-room and runs the risk as in this case of shooting somebody in the room. If it were thoughtlessly done it amounted to madness but if brought there deliberately, loaded, it looked like an intention to commit a crime. We have no proof that the prisoner ever did a like act before this and he cannot therefore plead careless habit as a reason for having the loaded revolver on this night. It will be well to keep that point before you in considering the evidence of what followed.

“Now the principal witness for the Crown is the butler, William Shortham, and I must say his story is clear, connected and forcible. He seems an inoffensive man, with no motive so far as I can see for misrepresenting or distorting what occurred, and notwithstanding the strictures



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passed upon his conduct as an eavesdropper, which is not a decent occupation but which I am sure is practised in decent houses, his evidence has not been shaken by the masterly effort of learned Counsel for the prisoner. No attempt has been made to controvert the facts, that a shot was fired, that Greton fired it and that it killed this poor girl, Edith Busch, but we are confronted with the difficulty of deciding whether that shot was the result of a malicious forethought or due to a hapless misadventure. Details of every circumstance connected with the event are therefore of prime value in helping the jury to arrive at a proper verdict.

"I have said that Shortham's story is clear and well-connected in its main features but at the critical time when the lights were turned on, he was looking through a glass window and it is for you to say if you can rely on the absolute accuracy of the version he has given. The sudden darkening of the room, the shot, and the lights again restored, must have disturbed the nerves of an ordinary man, and Shortham is rather a nervous specimen of the ordinary man, and you must therefore allow for a certain amount of exaggeration as the result of excitement in the story he has told. A shock to the nervous system reacts naturally upon the eyesight and gives different impressions of the same event to two people who witness it. How far the butler

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obtained the correct or an exaggerated impression of the incidents which passed under his eye that night, it is your privilege to examine but I ask you to give the matter, in justice to the prisoner, your most careful consideration.

“There can be no doubt the prisoner discharged the revolver with fatal effect, that is admitted by the nature of the defence. The serious point then is the question of antecedent acts which prove motive and establish the character of the crime. About the antecedent acts the evidence of the butler would not be conclusive if it stood alone but you must take into account the statements of Mrs. Mason in her cross-examination in which she admitted taunting the prisoner with having killed this girl, thereby disclosing a motive, and that admission substantiates and corroborates inferentially the direct evidence of Shortham. Crime has never been committed without a motive but until the motive is shown you cannot assume that a crime was committed. The butler swears that the prisoner was rejected by Edith Busch and that on a date prior to her death he overheard her indignantly resent some objectionable proposition, declaring that rather than consent she would sacrifice her life. With the latter statement the prisoner is not directly identified but it is quite evident that the proposition involved something people value more than life and whether you think the case presented by

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the Crown puts the right construction upon that incident or not you are to judge. You can never prove motive beyond all doubt by antecedent acts alone: they are the foundation of a charge which the charge itself helps to strengthen by a process of reaction, and if you believe the evidence for the prosecution, motive clearly exists in this case and the prisoner's conduct appears cruel and deliberate.

"I now come to another consideration. Was any crime committed or is all this elaborate trial so much energy wasted upon what is nothing more important or more serious than an unfortunate accident? There is always a simple and effective explanation of an accident—the truth. The butler swore that no word was spoken in the room before the shot was fired. Against that witness Gabriel tells us that Rial Greton explained the mechanism of the revolver. Mrs. Mason makes a similar statement; but before you discredit Shortham's oath you should remember that glaring discrepancies occur in the evidence for the defence. Gabriel and Mrs. Mason contradict each other and the latter contradicted herself several times. According to Gabriel, Mrs. Mason came first into the room on the night of this tragedy, according to Mrs. Mason, Edith Busch was the first to enter, while William Shortham is positive that the first to appear was Gabriel. You have the confused statements of two parties against the plain and unshaken testimony of

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one who witnessed the whole affair. So far then as truth is concerned I think you cannot exercise too much discretion as regards the statements for the defence.

“It is a pity the prosecution cannot throw more light on what really happened that night in the angle of the room concealed from outside observation. Instead of rushing to the assistance of the injured woman whom they had no right to assume was dead unless it was meant beforehand to kill her, Gabriel, Mrs. Mason, and the prisoner retired to this niche or angle where they hold a private consultation. Why did they act in this manner? Gabriel and Mrs. Mason give different versions of what took place. It would be in the prisoner's favour and to his credit, if an accident happened, that he and the other persons present should immediately assist the injured person and not retire like guilty people from the presence of the dead body of their victim; their action in my opinion was unnatural and inhuman and entirely inconsistent with the plea of accident now put forward on the prisoner's behalf.

“Witnesses for the defence are always distrusted by the prosecution though they have often helped to convict a criminal but if ever there existed reason for suspicion and danger to the prisoner it exists in regard to the evidence of this man Gabriel and this lady Mrs. Mason. How much of their evidence is truth, how much falsehood, no man who heard them could say, but there is no mistake they have

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allowed themselves a freedom of statement and elasticity of conscience which make it utterly impossible for the prisoner to gain the least benefit from their testimony. The most favourable fact in the prisoner's behalf which I can mention is that he might be the blind instrument of designs hidden from our gaze, but partly revealed by the characters in the play. That is only an opinion which can have no weight in this case but which would place a different construction on the circumstances if the defence were of another kind. The fact that the prisoner is of weak mind does not of itself constitute any justification for a criminal act because all criminals might claim to be of weak mind but when such a person works under the influence of a stronger will or is used unconsciously to forward the projects of a skilful criminal the question of weak mind assumes a different aspect. We have however no evidence in the defence to warrant the jury in raising doubts about the prisoner's full and personal responsibility and neither judge nor jury can act outside the evidence placed before them.

"The whole case presents curious and extraordinary features. As I stated at the beginning it is quite mysterious in some respects; in others it is quite plain. A judge and jury cannot see into the minds of other people. They must come to conclusions upon evidence of visible acts and established motives. Justice has often to depend

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upon poor instruments to obtain proof of guilt but justice would have little chance in this or any other country if the principle were not adopted that all men are equal in a court of law, that all are human and that all have a crooked strain when brought into contention and collision with their fellow-men. The evidence therefore in this trial must be viewed from the standpoint of human credibility and when you have given thought and deliberation to all that has been stated and arrived at a verdict you have done your duty between your consciences and the prisoner. It is an onerous responsibility to decide whether the life of the unfortunate prisoner is forfeit to the law of this country for the murder of a fellow-being or whether he shall go free, rehabilitated in character, his freedom assured and his life spared. The issue is now in your hands and may Providence direct you to a true and impartial verdict."

CHAPTER XXI

The fair and judicious charge of the judge left the decision entirely with the jury but Helen and George Mowbray justly feared that fair play would fail against the prejudice of men who had already made up their minds. The impossibility of eradicating from the jury-box the impressions and ideas formed beforehand militates against strict impartiality, but a system that has survived the ages must be as near perfection as human foresight and ingenuity can devise. Rial Greton could hope for no better tribunal than one constituted of his own peers and if he were condemned circumstances and not the jury must be held responsible.

When the judge had ceased speaking the jury slowly filed out of Court to the room where their momentous deliberations would take place. Has the reader ever waited among those who sat in suspense for hours while the fate of a fellow-man was in the balance? The judge and the prisoner usually disappear, one to think if he has acted according to law and justice between man and

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man, perhaps allowing regret to mingle with his sense of duty that such sad and solemn work must be done; the other to tremble in lonely awe at the dread thought that his hours are numbered, that past joys and pleasures, the remembrance of his happy youth, liberty, love and honour are gone for ever. Hope, which never deserts the heart of man, which is planted there by Him whose boundless charity we forget in the pride of freedom, sustains the joyless and wretched prisoner. What higher evidence of the great beneficence of God need men seek, than this inscrutable gift to all mankind, so strongly manifested in their hours of darkest peril. We call it hope. Is it not more correct to say God the Comforter, standing boldly by the side of His created image, forgetting the creature's human faults, his errors and his crimes—forgetting his sin and his ingratitude in the purifying light of a Father's love, a love that surpasseth all human understanding? If hope deserted humanity we should think God had ceased to exist, yet men deny God who acknowledge the power of hope, that one grand and convincing proof of God's existence. Rial Greton in his gloomy cell, abandoned, disgraced and manacled, beset with terror at the prospect of being found guilty of a terrible crime, found consolation in hope alone. The people in Court, free to speak in the absence of the judge, made little use of the privilege. A spell seemed to be cast upon them. They sat waiting in a strange

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silence, their thoughts turned inward, in a state of weird expectancy, anxious about the prisoner's fate but not sympathetic.

At the end of an hour the jury wearing solemn faces returned to Court, the foreman at their head with the fatal paper in his hand. It is passed to the clerk, the judge takes his seat, the prisoner is put forward and a tremulous voice is heard announcing to the hushed Court:—

“Gentlemen, you have agreed to your verdict. You say the prisoner is guilty.”

Rial Greton sank half-fainting on the rails of the dock, his eyes swimming in a mist of bewilderment and terror, and his heart crushed by the dire import of that appalling word.

Helen Fortescue looked like one transfixed with mute horror. Her eyes stared wildly at the judge, the jury, the prisoner and the audience.

As Mowbray could give neither comfort nor consolation to those two sorrowing friends his mind was busy with thoughts of the mystery that lay behind these proceedings. Rial Greton was now indeed in a dreadful dilemma. The doctor bent over and whispered Helen to show a braver front to misfortune and she nobly responded to his appeal, wiping away her tears and asking if some effort was not possible to save Rial.

“Yes,” said the doctor, in low earnest tones, “I have received great light from the words of the judge and from the contradictions and admissions

of Mrs. Mason. I have no doubt now of Rial's innocence but I must seek out a clue at once to destroy the conspiracy that exists between Gabriel and Mrs. Mason."

"You think they are both concerned," murmured Helen through her distress.

"They have treated the darkening of the room as an accident but I believe it is the incident in the case which should have called forth the minutest examination, for I believe whoever put out the lights that night fired the shot which killed poor Edith. I must endeavour to see Rial and induce him to give me full details. He surely will be able to supply the clue I want, but the trouble is to obtain an interview with him alone now that he shall be placed in the condemned cell."

These last words congealed the blood in Helen's veins.

"I must think it out fully," said the doctor, "to-night, and see how I can attain my object without delay."

The judge waited till Rial had recovered from the first shock of the verdict and then the formal question was put if he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon him.

The prisoner's lips moved nervously but no sound could be heard. He made a further effort to speak and there came in faltering tones the rather indistinct declaration, "I am innocent."

An incredulous, mocking grin overspread the

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features of the spectators, accentuated in Mrs. Hurst's expression of scowling disbelief and impatient gesture of disdain. Even when every feeling of decency and humanity demanded consideration for the unhappy prisoner, hard hearts could afford him no shred of compassion.

The judge quietly ignored the prisoner's protestation and solemnly pronounced the sentence which consigned him to a felon's death within prison walls.

Many who were not present but had heard the result hurried to the precincts of the Court to see the convict removed and the chief actors leaving the scene of this sensational trial.

During the momentous hours that passed Greton had avoided Helen's glance but just as he was leaving the dock their eyes met in one long expressive look of tenderness and sympathy. The great sorrow written on her face haunted him in the inmost confines of the jail till he became filled with bitter remorse for his folly and madness in rejecting her love. If he could recall the past how gladly would he make amends for his conduct and endeavour to earn her gratitude and esteem.

In a few minutes the Court, so full of interest and touching incident an hour before, became an empty space, its shadows, aching under the echoes of the day. Helen, sick almost to faintness with overpowering emotions, came forth slowly, feebly, leaning on George Mowbray's arm. The angels

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might have wept for the load of sorrow borne by that fragile, tottering form, yet Mowbray heard angry whispers and foul insinuations uttered while this afflicted woman passed through the crowd. She neither knew nor cared what was said. A point is reached where no lower depths exist and she had now touched the deepest depths of human misery in her native town. The man she loved lay under sentence of death and her own character and innocence had not gone unscathed by the tongues of malignant and evil people. Regard for the Doctor imposed some restraint on the crowd, otherwise their hostility might have added to Helen's horror, the outward expression of wanton disrespect.

Through the trying agony of the day her brave soul had been sustained by a superhuman effort of the will, but when she reached home nature demanded the toll of fighting tremendous odds and Helen sank to an unconscious state of collapse. The doctor looked carefully for any symptoms of danger but observed nothing to cause alarm. She seemed resting in this blessed oblivion as in a deep sleep. What a noble, unselfish girl he thought while he kept vigil, suffering a world of pain for ill-requited love. Her pallid face and contracted brows gave indication of keen mental distress but her firm, compressed lips told of unconquerable resolution. On her face even in repose there could be seen the stamp of determination which no reverse or sorrow or pain could shake. The doctor

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marvelled as he had frequently done upon the folly of her fancy for Rial Greton yet he excused her, nay praised her, when he remembered that to the same feeling could be attributed his own overwhelming and unchangeable attachment to Edith Busch.

Ah! poor Edith. Her grave would not be complete till he was placed by her side; his heart was sacred to her memory. What mournful pleasure it was to hear the tributes paid in Court to her matchless beauty; but those who praised her thus had never felt the celestial fire which tingled in his veins during the luscious moments when he held her graceful form to his heart and heard words that still thrilled like sweet music through ever fibre of his being. Why, he wondered, as he had wondered hundreds of times since her death, had Fate been so cruel to him? In a few short weeks a woman, incomparable among her sex, suddenly enters his life, changes every current of thought within him and then disappears in the still, mysterious, tragic manner, investigated by the Court. Every incident came back afresh, haunting him with the yet unaccomplished promise to avenge her death. His progress—and the admission gave him much pain—had been slow, not far removed from total failure; and if he could not succeed before the time appointed for Rial's execution, his future would be clouded with the horrifying thought that an innocent man was

sacrificed to appease public clamour. As he had told Helen, he must at once find some clue that might place him on the track of a full and complete discovery. Should he win or would Rial go to his unhonoured doom, was the question which confronted him with disturbing vividness as he waited for Helen's recovery?

That came sooner than he expected. Startled as if by some shadow haunting her dreams, she woke with a scream, her limbs in a tremble and her eyes staring wildly round the room. A kind word from the doctor helped to soothe her mind and restore her memory. She became calmer, more collected, in a short time, and though wearied with sorrow tried to speak hopefully when she referred to the day's proceedings.

Mowbray advised her for the sake of her health and womanly feelings to leave Bayview. His friends would be glad to receive and entertain her as long as she wished to remain and he could guarantee they would be particularly kind at the present time.

"I thank you very much for your sympathy and good intentions. I appreciate all you have done so highly that it makes it difficult to refuse your offer. But," and she spoke with unwonted firmness, "I have made up my mind to remain here until Rial is either dead or saved. If he dies I shall be free when I have proclaimed his innocence and if he is saved he shall want me."

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The stern unyielding qualities in her nature, so gentle and so womanly in ordinary affairs, reminded the doctor of those brave souls who faced torment and death in defence of Christian faith. Helen would have been a martyr in other circumstances and in another age. He knew how useless it was to press his opinion against her decision and he quietly acquiesced, offering his ready assistance whenever she required it.

"How pitiless the public can be," she reflected, with bitter feeling in her heart. "I have committed no crime, I am innocent as any of them, yet they torture me with every species of mental anguish that malice and infamy can devise. Must I suffer this wrong? Must I bear this burden? Still, what can I do?" and this last thought saddened her, for there are wrongs which have to be suffered whether we like or not and those are the cruellest wrongs that can be inflicted upon man or woman.

"Yes," she said aloud. "I think we must see Rial. If you cannot succeed I will try. We must act very promptly and strain every effort before we acknowledge failure. He is entitled to a visit from friends for a short time every day but the warders are always present at those interviews. If we could manage to get rid of the warders for half an hour you or I could induce Rial to tell the whole story."

"After all if there is no story. Suppose he is the victim of circumstances we are willing to under-

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stand but which others regard as proofs of his guilt, what are we to do? It is better not to be too sanguine or our disappointment will be the harder to bear."

A shade of deeper distress settled on Helen's seared face. A man condemned by the law of the land is not easily saved when all the necessary legal forms have been rigidly observed. She felt the force of the doctor's observation and with a sinking feeling in her heart had to admit its sense and wisdom.

They sat for a long time planning and arranging their future action but an unexpected event occurred which placed the doctor in an excellent position to learn Rial's story.

CHAPTER XXII

Among his letters next morning the doctor observed a large official envelope which at once attracted his notice. He tried to guess its purport while opening it, but was quite unprepared for the contents of the document. Imagine his astonishment to find himself quite unexpectedly appointed Medical Officer of Bayview Prison, with indisputable authority as regards the health and treatment of prisoners in that Institution. He could scarcely believe that such luck was possible at a moment when the stars in their courses were set against Rial Greton's life. He rushed off immediately to inform Helen. Her father had occupied the position for years but prisoners were so few that it was not much more than a sinecure. It became necessary with a man under sentence of death that a doctor should attend daily and this accounted for the sudden appointment of George Mowbray. Although free from superstition they both regarded the event as a most Providential circumstance at this critical time. Mowbray learned afterwards

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that prisoners have to be medically examined when admitted to prison but that duty had been done in Rial's case by the medical inspector of the Prisons Board who happened to be in Bayview when the prisoner was arrested.

"I think you had better go at once to the prison, show the Governor your authority and see Rial," suggested Helen with a woman's eager anxiety when her heart is in travail and love gives wings to her feelings.

"I had the same thought myself," replied the doctor with equal enthusiasm.

"Then go," she said, "and God bless you,"

She watched his manly and resolute step hastening down the street in the direction of the prison. "My best friend," she sighed as he disappeared; "George Mowbray's name will be dear to me while life lasts," and she gazed again into the empty street.

The massive grey walls loomed up against a dull-coloured sky, giving a grim and repulsive aspect to the exterior of the place. The doctor paused to bring under control the emotions surging upon him with such force that he feared his anxiety would betray a purpose to the keen-eyed officials within. It took some time before the Governor could be summoned from the depths of the chilling labyrinth of locks and bars, while Mowbray waited in the anteroom,—an outer cell, flagged, comfortless and bare—his feelings cooled to zero by the

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first glimpse of life within those high walls which frowned forbiddingly upon the world about them. The Governor when he came, convinced Mowbray that he was an ill-natured man fitted by appearance and inclination to act a mean and contemptible part in this life. His cheeks were so much withered yellow parchment, his eyes squinty and restless, his manner silent but disrespectful and his footstep stealthy like that of a cat. Nature had denied him the serene gift of looking his fellow-man straight in the face; and Nature's hallmark was justified by a suspicious and cowardly disposition. He distrusted everyone in prison and outside of it; he spied impartially on the movements of prisoners and warders and punished both classes with equal harshness and severity. The bang of the iron doors, the jangle and perpetual rattle of heavy keys made happiness for the perverted soul of this ogre. It was a grand distinction in his official record that he should have the privilege of seeing a victim led to the gallows under his personal superintendence, and he might expect promotion if the job were done without hitch or murmur of disapproval. The doctor's appointment came as an ill-timed intrusion upon the Governor's particular sphere of right and duty and his grunt of consent to the admission of the new Medical Officer, betrayed the chagrin he felt at an outsider's invasion of prison secrecy and routine. With a vicious, cruel leer, such as that which inspired terror in his realm as

autocrat, he gave a snappish order to one of his men to show Mowbray through the building.

"I want to see the prisoner who was sentenced yesterday," said the doctor when he had reached the inner circle in which the cells radiated from a central platform.

"Do you wish to examine him?" asked the warder with respectful courtesy.

"Yes. I must enter a report of the state of his health with any observations I find necessary to make in the prison register."

The warder proceeded at a smart pace down the echoing corridor and through a door at the end which he first unlocked and then locked behind him. The doctor left alone felt the oppressive stillness of the prison house, the silence that awes with its intensity. After a prolonged interval, the distant and dull bang of an iron door announced some sign of life and shortly afterwards Rial Greton in the middle of two powerful custodians stood in the doctor's presence, the personification of misery and despair.

"I wish to examine this prisoner," said Mowbray without looking at Rial. "Take him to the Hospital Ward."

The warders carried out these instructions with military promptitude of action, and when the doctor who followed close behind entered the room the warders withdrew leaving Rial and himself together.

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Mowbray immediately dropped the cool demeanour of the official and with sympathetic impulse stretched out his hand to the unhappy man before him. Rial's sunken eyes, his hollow cheeks, his nervous restrained manner, proclaimed a condition of suspense and suffering in mind and body. A look of trust, of gratitude, stole into his bloodshot eyes and pale face, as he clutched with the eagerness of a man who sees help in a moment of danger the hand extended towards him.

"I am sorry to find you in such a painful position," said the doctor kindly; "sorry for your own sake and for Helen's."

"I have treated her badly," moaned Rial with a despairing groan. Tears came to his eyes and his accents faltered. "I should have taken your advice and this ruin would not have fallen upon me."

"Don't despair," declared the doctor encouragingly, "fortune has favoured my wish to see you. Helen and I believe you are innocent and we are determined to save you but you must give us all the assistance in your power."

Mowbray saw a gleam of hope light up the prisoner's face.

"You declared in Court yesterday that you were innocent. Tell me why you made the statement?"

"Because I never fired the shot."

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This startling admission, so definite and so important, took Mowbray completely by surprise. It brought back all his suspicions with tenfold force.

"Who fired it?" he asked with suppressed interest.

"I cannot tell."

This answer was a keen disappointment.

"William's story," continued Rial, "is partly true. The lights were put out, the shot was fired and I was found with the revolver in my hand but I did not fire the shot."

"Did you say so at the time?"

"No; I was too terrified by what happened. I remember I shook all over and when Mrs. Mason accused me of killing Edith I said in my fright it was an accident. She charged me with murder and vowed I would hang for it. Gabriel and herself then took me away to the corner of the room and made me sign a document confessing my guilt and agreeing to give them five hundred pounds a year each to remain silent. It was also agreed between us that Gabriel should supply the details to the public while I should admit to everyone that I killed Edith accidentally.

"Why did you agree to these proposals?"

"Mrs. Mason said Gabriel's evidence and her own would hang me. I was in deadly fear and terror at this threat. I would have done anything they asked me to save myself."

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"How was it that you were found with the revolver in your hand?"

"I felt something drop heavily into my pocket. I pulled it out. It was the revolver. The whole affair occupied only a few seconds. I felt terribly shocked to see Edith lying dead on the floor."

Mowbray choked down a sob of regret and indignation. He had no longer any doubt she was the victim of a cowardly crime but only a faint light was yet thrown upon the real perpetrator.

"Can you tell me who lowered the lights that night?" asked the doctor, "that is a most important fact."

"I don't know. They went out suddenly, leaving the place in perfect darkness."

"Do you suspect anyone?"

Rial stopped for a moment trying to recollect.

"No," he answered. "But of course if they did not go out accidentally they were put out by Gabriel or Mrs. Mason."

"I wonder which," reflected the doctor, puzzled by Rial's vagueness.

"You were infatuated with Edith Busch?" He put this question suddenly as if performing a distasteful duty.

Rial flushed at the statement but made no reply. It seemed like a reproach now.

"Did you offer to marry her?"

"I did, for I loved her deeply." Rial spoke with much earnestness.

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The slightest shade of annoyance, unobserved by the prisoner, crossed the doctor's face. Both men remained silent. They were at a point of conflict where bitter thoughts might rise, but the doctor's magnanimity overcame the jealous pang he felt and he quickly passed to the next question.

"She refused your offer?"

"She did. She said I was not the man she would select as a husband, that she esteemed my kindness and friendship but that she loved another, a handsome and a clever man and she would love him while she lived."

Mowbray knew these words referred to himself. They filled him with pride in her constancy and fond recollection of one he had lost for ever. He turned from Rial to hide the feelings he found difficult to suppress.

"Did you repeat your offer?"

"No. She was too firm in her refusal. I could see it might pain her to speak a second time and I refrained. Her refusal nearly killed me and I have no heart in the world since."

"Did you ask her the name of the man she loved?"

"Yes; I presumed so far. I was carried away by my feelings and glad when she let the question pass unnoticed."

"Coming now to your defence at the trial, did you tell your Counsel that you were innocent?"

"No. After my arrest I expressed a wish to

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see Gabriel and he came here. He told me there was no fear of serious consequences if I left the matter in his hands but that it was absolutely necessary to adhere to the original report of an accident. If I made any other statement Mrs. Mason would give evidence for the prosecution and I would have no chance of escape. He strongly advised me not to say a word to anyone and that when he and Mrs. Mason gave evidence on my behalf the jury would at once acquit me. You see how differently the affair has ended for me."

"I don't think you have any reason to trust Gabriel or Mrs. Mason," urged the doctor quietly.

"The very same idea has occurred to me but I can do nothing now. Nobody will believe in my innocence when my own witnesses gave the strongest evidence against me and who will listen to me if I speak against them? I expected Mrs. Mason would tell the truth but if she were paid to swear away my life she could not have done me greater injury."

The doctor felt agreeably astonished at the change in Rial's attitude towards his tutor and housekeeper. His intelligence appeared to have been awakened by the shock of the ordeal through which he had just passed.

"I know Gabriel is in your family for a long period but I wish to ascertain under what circumstances you engaged Mrs. Mason. I have a

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particular purpose in asking. I want to find out who she really is."

"I am afraid I cannot tell very much," replied Rial, "but I will give you what information I possess."

Rial then entered upon particulars of Mrs. Mason's engagement as hostess and housekeeper. At Gabriel's earnest desire and to replace, as Gabriel said, the tender offices of a lost mother Rial consented to her appointment. She came with flattering testimonials from a distinguished nobleman. His lordship's letters enumerated many excellent domestic virtues, dwelt upon her charity and affability, vouched for her gentle birth and kind disposition, and concluded with a confident belief that any home entrusted to her care would never feel the want of a good and sympathetic mother. Such a recommendation proved irresistible and Mrs. Charlotte Mason—this was not her real name as she took pains afterwards to explain in a way to insinuate that it would be hurtful to reveal her indenture—duly arrived at Bayview House. The next morning she announced her intention of giving a ball to the people of the town and neighbourhood. The proposal alarmed Rial, who protested that his tutor would not approve of this innovation in their mode of life and in trembling accents he appealed to her not to press the matter. Mrs. Mason however persisted, remarking that the tutor must be a fool or a rogue,

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that her suggestion was a proper one, intended for Rial's pleasure, and she insisted despite Gabriel's displeasure in carrying out her purpose. While this discussion was in progress Gabriel came on the scene. The effect of the tutor's unexpected appearance had a terrorising effect upon Rial, who lost all presence of mind and with difficulty introduced Gabriel to Mrs. Mason. The latter shortly after repeated her proposition in bolder tones than before.

"Madam," thundered Gabriel, "I can give no countenance to such impropriety. My charge is a young, unmarried man and I have sworn to preserve him from the corruption of a vile world. Your action would endanger his morals and destroy the life of sanctity which it was his poor mother's pride to guard from the faintest suggestion of evil. I am surprised that a woman of your sense and years should have such ridiculous ideas. Take my advice and abandon this evil notion. It is a suggestion which in other places might not be open to objection but here it is improper—very improper and cannot be entertained."

The words seemed to sting Mrs. Mason with the force of an undeserved insult. She sprang to her feet, fire darting from her fierce eyes, and in scornful tones addressed Gabriel:

"How dare you, sir, insinuate improper action to me. You are no gentleman and are therefore ignorant of the ways and manners of gentlemen.

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On that ground I may excuse you but what right have you to interfere between a lady in this house and its owner who has given her full authority to do as she thinks right. Keep your real or affected piety to yourself and allow me to perform my duties in the position I am called to occupy in the manner I wish. The dance must be held and furthermore the people who come must be informed that my social position is equal to theirs. I will not make a greater claim though I might with honour and truth say that I have moved in superior circles."

Mrs. Mason's passionate tones died away to a quiet, mysterious emphasis on the last sentence. During her speech Rial's courage had returned like that of a drowning man suddenly grasped by a strong hand. He stole a glance of admiration at the woman who had confronted Gabriel so defiantly and waited the outcome of this interesting duel with strange curiosity.

Taken aback by her look of offended dignity and the fiery indignation of her remarks Gabriel's next words lacked the confidence of his first statement.

"Pray excuse me, Mrs. Mason," he argued, "improper was perhaps the wrong word. I should have said unwise, which is what I really meant. You don't understand my position. Rial has been trained apart from the sin and sorrow of this world; he has been brought up a perfect gentleman

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with a mind free from the vices and foul abominations of the flesh and to keep him in that state of bliss and virtue Mrs. Greton charged me on her death bed as a sacred duty. I cannot discharge my trust if I allow him to taste the pleasures of temptation in a ballroom."

Mrs. Mason laughed in a sharp derisive manner and told Gabriel to put the young man in a glass case. In curling lip and angered eye were plainly written the disgust which Gabriel's objection had aroused within her. She denounced the tutor for treating Rial as he might a lunatic instead of allowing him the freedom and innocent delights of a young man of human sympathies and passions.

"I protest against this innovation in our house," exclaimed the tutor solemnly, as he left the room in a sullen and disappointed manner.

"Your protests are of little avail while I rule here," she said, raising her voice so that the retreating Gabriel should hear.

Rial had not attempted to interfere in this dispute between tutor and housekeeper. It pained him to see them in conflict at their first meeting but he could not conceal the secret pleasure that in this affair of the dance the battle had gone in favour of Mrs. Mason. Her success relieved him from the necessity of explanations to Gabriel and established the authority of the housekeeper without further trouble.

Such were," the details told in awkward and

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disconnected style by Rial Greton of Mrs. Mason's first appearance in Bayview House.

"You have shown that Gabriel and Mrs. Mason were at enmity. How long did that feeling last?"

"Not very long. They were intimate friends the next day."

"Of course they were," said the doctor aloud, as he inwardly reflected that probably both she and Gabriel knew each other well, and were simply playing a game in Rial's presence in order to blind him to their real character and purpose.

The doctor having learned many other interesting and important facts bade Rial be of hope and left the prison.

In some respects his interview was satisfactory; in other respects, highly unsatisfactory. It confirmed Helen's faith and the doctor's in Rial's innocence but between absolute faith and clear proof there is a wide gulf and until he mastered the secret hidden beneath Gabriel's deception and Mrs. Mason's duplicity, Rial's life would remain in peril. Truth to tell he felt the task to which he had committed himself greater than he could accomplish within the limited time at his disposal. The clue he sought was still missing. What argument could he put forward to commute the sentence or stay execution? Rial had declared his innocence in open Court; such declarations are frequent even among hardened criminals who wish to create doubt about their guilt or save their unfortunate families from

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the disgrace of a confession of the crime; and the authorities would require some very cogent reasons, supported by new and important facts, before they interfered with the course of the law. All this difficulty stared Mowbray in the face, mocking his deep desire, his most earnest efforts to overcome it. With a heavy heart, but with courage undaunted, he returned to Helen for the purpose of retailing the story he had learned behind the prison walls.

"Surely they will not destroy the life of an innocent man. He must be set free." Helen's hope would not brook the thought that a legal tragedy was possible.

The doctor saw with pleasure the good effect of the news he communicated but advised Helen against being too sanguine as their worst fears might be realised if they failed to discover the whole truth before the day fixed for Rial's death. She listened to this prudent admonition rather impatiently, attributing too much caution to the doctor's statement and making him feel sorry for raising any doubt to mar her new-found happiness. Her patience in suffering had turned to enthusiasm at the prospect of being amply rewarded for the pain and sorrow she had endured by the full restoration of Rial's reputation and liberty.

A hasty, imperative knock at the hall-door caused Helen and Mowbray to exchange anxious looks. They recognised Harry Duncan's voice demanding

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in breathless accents to see Miss Helen or the doctor. Before they could recover from their astonishment at this interruption, which they instinctively connected with the subject they were discussing, Duncan rushed into their presence, and began in a gasping, agitated manner to explain that Miss Busch had left an important packet in her room bearing on the mystery of her life and addressed to Doctor Mowbray.

CHAPTER XXIII

Public credulity is so easily imposed upon that everywhere Harry Duncan went on the evening of Rial's conviction and sentence, he found the same unquestioning belief in the guilt of the prisoner and this belief was shared by all inhabitants from the highest to the lowest in the town. They accepted the verdict not as a human act, liable to error, but as a just decree of Providence to punish the perpetrator of a cowardly crime. The Pharisees were respectable, pious men who with proper outward signs thanked God they were of the self-righteous order, but the people of Bayview would resent a comparison with the Pharisees as a wanton derogation of character, and yet the difference was only in degree not in principle. The Pharisees typified human nature as it was, as it is and as it will remain to the end of time; they were of the earth earthly but they gained an abnormal reputation by pitting themselves against the Author of Truth and hence they are condemned with contempt by people who still follow their example.

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Hundreds of smug-faced Pharisees lived in Bayview. Some were poor, some were rich, some were haughty, some were filled with pride that apes humility, they were all Christians, all went to Church, but not one but lifted up his eyes and with bold acclaim thanked God he was not as Rial Greton, the sinner and the criminal. The absence of sympathy, the absence of charity, the absence of humility brought everlasting odium on the proud priests of the Synagogue but for the defects which excite hate against an ancient sect, modern society claims praise in hunting down the wrecks of misfortune and circumstance, of necessity and heredity.

Duncan felt indignant at the readiness, without pause, reflection or shame, to heap infamy on Rial Greton's name; to tear open the cerements of the grave and drag up the dead forms of his father and mother in a ghoulish search for some evil rumour against their lives. This indecent exhibition of the vile instincts of the man-hunter made the orgies of the drinking saloons ring with the outrageous language of fiends. Shortham the butler was fêted as a hero, whose instrumentality in bringing home guilt compelled admiration, while exciting the envy of the more ardent admirers of strong drink and stern justice. Unlooked for and with disgust, Duncan heard his name also receive "honourable mention," as a witness at the trial, but to this circumstance, which at the moment filled

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him with regret, he owed the discovery referred to at the close of the last chapter. He had followed the evidence closely, noted discrepancies in the statements on both sides, remembered his experience of Gabriel and Bayview House, and of the man whose existence there had never been explained, and his mind was filled with the oft-recurring fancy that something was wrong and that the trial did not disclose the true facts of the tragedy. This impression vague at first became firmly fixed, and without consulting Mowbray, he decided to try and obtain some proof if possible from the impulse urging him to make inquiries. For that reason he overcame the repugnance he felt at the tributes paid to the butler's success and found opportunity helped by the mention of his own name to join with the others in flattering that individual.

"The jury seemed to place great confidence in your evidence," began Duncan as he took a seat beside the butler, away from the noisy groups talking and smoking in the tap-room.

"Why not, sir? I told what I saw. It was a plain case. The unfortunate young fellow lost his head to that dolly girl and when he could not marry her he killed her. If you saw him as I did and heard what he said you would have no doubt. It is a terrible thing to be hanged," and the butler shuddered.

"Of course it is plain against him, but what do you think of Gabriel and Mrs. Mason?"

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William lowered his voice to a whisper and bending close to Duncan said, "I believe they are a pair of bad birds. While I was in the house they were always together, moving about like ghosts and stealing upon me when I thought they were in a different place altogether. They are rum ones and no mistake."

"Were you the only man-servant there?"

"The only one."

"Had you ever any man living in the house but Gabriel, Rial Greton and yourself?"

"Not to my knowledge. I thought one evening I saw a man in Gabriel's room through the door which was slightly ajar as I passed, but I suppose I was mistaken."

"Were you ever inside Gabriel's room?"

"Never. He would not allow me nor the women servants to enter it. He hated women he said. He made his own bed and change of clothing was left outside his door."

"Do you like him?"

"No. I was very much afraid of him. I think he had some knowledge of magic. I often saw him go into a room and before two seconds passed he walked out from another place. He could walk through the walls."

Duncan felt inclined to smile at William's innocence but allowed his face to show surprise.

"How did Miss Busch live while she was there?"

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"She often appeared very troubled and unhappy. At breakfast which she always took alone I found her crying several times and her beautiful face very pale and sad. She never spoke except to thank me for attending to her wants. I felt great pity for the constant distress of such a lovely lady. I don't think I ever saw a smile on her face. She was so gentle and kind I would do anything I could for her with pleasure. The master and herself kept company a good deal every day but I always noticed that she had little interest in his society. He seemed too giddy for her. When they went out in the grounds for a walk Gabriel and Mrs. Mason would follow at once. I now think they must have been watching her."

"Did anything occur any night before her death which surprised you?"

"It wasn't easy to surprise me with such a man as Gabriel in the house. The servants were prisoners in the place. One night I found myself locked in after going to bed. I heard a piercing scream in the direction of Miss Busch's apartments and I got up to open the door but it was locked. When I woke in the morning the door opened as usual. It struck me then I had been dreaming but from what happened afterwards I have changed my opinion."

"There was something going on which those interested were anxious to conceal from the servants?"

"I'm sure there was but I never heard anything said except what I swore to at the trial."

"You could not tell the jury who was in the room with Miss Busch at the time you referred to in your evidence."

"I was not certain."

"Perhaps it was Gabriel or Mrs. Mason and not Rial Greton. Where a man's life is at stake one should be very cautious."

"I told nothing but what I heard and saw. Gabriel and Mrs. Mason were only servants like myself and what business would they want with the young lady?"

"Yes, that is true," answered Duncan, who saw little hope of landing any fish from William's stream of talk. The wary old butler, while apparently frank and communicative, kept strict watch over his words and allowed nothing to escape which could injure himself or serve the prisoner. As a consequence the conversation drifted into desultory channels and Duncan was on the point of leaving when a good-natured, half-tipsy, rollicking tradesman, staggered out of a noisy group and accosted William in a jocosely familiar manner.

"Since you became a hero, William, you are inclined to forget old friends. Don't forget Jim Neven whatever you do, my boy," and Jim held out his hand to the man he addressed.

The painful expression on William's face

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proved that he had no desire to boast of the acquaintance. It was quite evident he preferred Jim's absence to his company just then, but Jim was in the humour to enjoy life which at the moment meant teasing the butler and he called on a number of stale jokes to assist him. It is distressing to see grown-up people enjoying stale jokes. If they get a stale egg they would scarcely smile but the stale joke is swallowed with relish.

Duncan swallowed a number, listened to inane gibberish and looked pleasant but a reward duly came for his patience and pretended enjoyment of the scene.

"By the way, what did you do with that packet you got from the dead woman?" asked Neven in a half-careless tone.

At this Duncan's every sense became alert. What was this packet? Why did Neven mention it? Was he jealous of the notice bestowed on William and anxious to detract from his importance and dignity? Whatever the cause Duncan felt there was something important behind the question.

"Well?" pressed Neven as William refused to notice the query.

The butler made no reply but gave a menacing look at Neven which made the latter suddenly silent. Shortly after William retired.

"You see," said Jim by way of explanation, William never likes any slur cast upon his educa-

tion. He can't read and when there is anything particular to be done he brings it to me to read for him. This packet I asked about was given him by Miss Busch or he said it was. It was addressed to Dr. Mowbray and on it was written the words 'To be opened in case Rial Greton's life is in danger.' The person who gets it will probably send it to the doctor but William should not lose his temper when I spoke about it. There is too much made of William's name over this murder business. And I don't know that all he said was Gospel truth. If he gets vexed I can get vexed. He'll want me before I want him."

"The packet ought to be sent to Dr. Mowbray as it is addressed to him. It is a very serious matter to hold back a letter belonging to another. One may as well take a person's money or life." Duncan spoke seriously and suggestively. It struck him from the nature of the superscription that the packet contained information of the highest interest to Rial Greton, which might possibly save him from the gallows. He began to feel that Edith's death and Rial Greton's conviction were more a mystery now than ever. "To be opened in case Rial Greton's life is in danger," the words stuck in his memory. He found himself repeating them.

"Where is the packet?" he demanded turning to Jim Neven with a meaning in his words that frightened the butler's friend.

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Neven looked confused and ill at ease, the gaiety of bibulous indulgence suddenly checked by the serious request of an earnest man.

"I can't say," he replied with assumed indifference "Shortham is the only person who knows. You must ask him. What he has done with it I cannot tell."

"Don't you think as a matter of right and fair play it should be given to the doctor. It was entrusted to William and he should not betray trust."

"Certainly. I don't think anyone should keep another person's letter or property. William is an honest fellow and will not do anything wrong I think."

"His mind is excited over the trial and if he thought the packet contained information favourable to the prisoner he might feel disposed to withhold it. We are all vain of our importance in the public eye and may do wrong against our natural inclinations. If you see him advise him to hand over the letter."

"You can rely on me to do that. I think it is only just."

It was late when Duncan sought his night's repose, but he was early astir next morning in the hope of tracing the packet and handing it over to the doctor. All his arts of persuasion and solicitation with the butler ended in blank failure. Shortham railed at the tipsy rambling of Neven and told Duncan that whatever the packet contained he thought his duty was to hand it to

Mrs. Mason and having done so he disclaimed any further responsibility. This Duncan believed to be a mere excuse invented during the night to throw inquirers off the track. The doubting, uncertain light in Shortham's eyes gave plain proof of equivocation on his part and from the desire shown to conceal the packet, Duncan concluded that the packet was a more important document than he thought at first. He knew it would be impossible to see Mrs. Mason or obtain any corroboration of the story at Bayview House and finding further inquiries on his own account useless he hastened to lay the whole facts before the doctor.

Helen and the doctor admired the astuteness displayed by Duncan in a trying situation.

"Your information brings us to a critical point in our efforts," exclaimed Mowbray when he had heard Duncan's statement, "we must gain possession of the packet. If Shortham brought it away from Bayview House he never took it back again."

"I am sure of it," added Duncan, "for I found out that he left Greton's service at the time of Rial's arrest."

"He must be keeping the packet for some purpose," thought the doctor.

"If the man is out of employment we should be able to secure it without any trouble," insisted Helen, whose fears were freshly roused by Shortham's conduct.

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"How can we force him to give it up or tell where it is? If Neven assists us we may succeed but Shortham has probably warned Neven and both will try to fool us. The packet surely contains the clue I am seeking."

As the doctor spoke he looked at Helen and Duncan as if their faces contained a solution of the problem. He was thinking hard.

"Will money tempt him?" urged Helen. "Few can resist its influence if the sum offered is sufficient."

"If he has sold it to an enemy of Rial's there would be no chance. He has no motive in keeping the packet. Who would be likely to want it? Who is your greatest enemy," he said, addressing Helen.

"I have so many," replied Helen, "that I cannot say who is my greatest."

"You may be certain," suggested Duncan, "that whoever has the packet will conceal and guard it very carefully. If in the hands of a desperate enemy, that enemy will take every precaution against discovery and the natural precaution will be to seal Shortham's lips either with a sufficient bribe or threat. If Shortham has no powerful incentive to remain silent we may be able to force him to speak if we act properly and judiciously.

"A woman may be of service now," said, Helen, her face suddenly changing with an idea suggested by Duncan's words. "I have a plan. Heaven grant my time has come to help Rial."

CHAPTER XXIV

At the end of Rial Greton's trial Mrs. Mason's and Gabriel's conduct excited particular attention. Neither showed any trace of the emotion which faithful servants usually exhibit at the disgrace of a kind employer and they left Court with indecent haste without breathing a word of sympathy and consolation in their master's ear as he passed from the dock to the condemned cell. Observant by-standers commented freely upon the heartless indifference manifested by the chief members of the prisoner's household at his sad and terrible fate, and when Mowbray heard of their base desertion it accentuated his belief that Gabriel and Mrs. Mason were both concerned in the crime which they had managed ingeniously to fasten upon their master.

They indulged in very little conversation on their way back to Bayview House. Whatever they said was spoken in whispers and they moved with the uncertain, nervous energy of those who having committed a wicked deed are

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anxious to place a long distance between themselves and their victim. Gabriel's solemn frown darkened to severity and the expression in Mrs. Mason's eyes changed to a restless hunted look.

What link bound those two people or what secret were they guarding with such precious care? That it concerned Edith Busch there could be no mistake from the conversation which took place when they were safe within the walls of Greton's unhappy home.

"My plans have entirely failed and I'm afraid we are ruined," said Gabriel. "Had Rial been acquitted everything would come right. I did my best for him but you bungled very badly in your evidence."

"Don't blame me, Gabriel" she pleaded. "I couldn't help it, you saw the fix they put me into when I had to leave Court. Edith is the real cause of all this business."

Gabriel smiled sardonically. "Why?" he asked, looking hard at the scared face of Mrs. Mason.

"She should have obeyed. She was in our power and we wanted nothing but what she might have consented to."

"For my part I blame that fellow Mowbray. He has not allowed the dead to rest in the grave. Since he first visited this house his suspicions have been strong against me. I am sure he believes Rial innocent and will make every effort to save him."

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Mrs. Mason shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

A sharp knock at the door interrupted and startled them.

An elderly person with pretensions to youth who was employed as parlourmaid entered and handed Mrs. Mason a sheet of foolscap which had been found in the room occupied by Edith Busch.

Mrs. Mason took the paper in her hand and allowed the maid to retire before she looked at it. Then she unfolded the paper and tried to decipher some manuscript in Edith's handwriting so scratched and blotched that nothing was intelligible on ordinary examination but on placing it between her and the light, she traced the name Mathews rather plainly among the interlineations. At this discovery Mrs. Mason uttered a shrill scream and let the document drop from her hands.

"What's the matter?" asked Gabriel, suddenly aroused from his gloomy thoughts.

"We're lost," gasped Mrs. Mason, a deadly pallor upon her face.

"Edith has told everything. This is a discarded page from her story."

"How do you know?" he asked anxiously.

"One word has been sufficient. I found the word on this page. See there—'Mathews.' You know what that means."

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Gabriel looked closely at the place indicated.

"Yes, quite true," and with a cynical compression of his lips he looked strangely at Mrs. Mason.

"What are we to do?" she asked.

"Trace the document at once."

"Who could have taken it away?"

"No one but Shortham. It was a great mistake to keep that fellow here so long."

"But if he has given it to Mowbray or Miss Fortescue what can we do?"

"Recover it," said Gabriel with decision.

"What shall I do?" she asked.

"You must watch their movements."

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CHAPTER XXV

It was a dark, cheerless night in Bayview and rain came down in torrents sweeping the streets like shrapnel, none but those with urgent business being abroad, who hurried or ran to cover according to weight and age until the town presented a desolate and deserted appearance. Heedless of the elements a lonely figure in black, closely muffled, walked boldly along the well-lighted main thoroughfare, and then plunged into a side street, which led to a squalid and none too classic quarter. She paused in doubt about the place she sought and then moving quicker stopped before a low house at the door of which she knocked. Helen Fortescue had come to William Shortham's for the packet which he had spoken of to Neven.

She was admitted through a rough, narrow stone passage to a dingy little room dimly lit by a solitary candle. A cane-bottom chair, a deal table covered with oil-cloth of greyish pattern and an ancient chest of drawers which

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served as sideboard and cupboard constituted the furniture of the apartment. Helen had heard of poverty and misery in humble life. Her heart sickened at bare contact with the wretchedness of this place, the atmosphere made her faint, yet this was the best room in the house, the one which Mrs. Shortham called her parlour and she was glad to show it to any stranger who visited her home. The poor have their pride as well as the rich—pride is an essential like the air, everywhere, sometimes pure and sometimes tainted.

"What can I do for you, dear," asked Mrs. Shortham, who thought Helen had called in reference to an offer of board and lodgings which appeared in a card on the window.

Helen removed her veil! "Don't you know me, Mrs. Shortham?" She spoke with winning smile and sweet, serious voice.

Mrs. Shortham turned so that the light played full on Helen's face, which looked thin and worn, and suddenly curtsied as she called out,

"Miss Helen, Miss Helen, you're welcome, you're welcome to my little home. Take the chair, Miss Helen, take the chair."

The old woman fussed about and curtsied round the table in an ecstasy of delight and excitement. The honour of having a real lady under her roof was more luck than she ever expected in this world.

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"Is William at home?" queried Helen in a familiar tone meant to put Mrs. Shortham at her ease.

"He is, Miss. He's at present in bed but I'll call him at once and tell him you're waiting."

"Please don't say I am here. Tell him a young lady wishes to see him."

Notwithstanding this caution Mrs. Shortham woman-like could not resist the temptation of telling her lord and master the name of their distinguished visitor. It was a whispered conversation but Helen heard the subdued tones of their voices through the wooden partition which separated the stuffy bedroom from the still stuffier parlour.

When Mrs. Shortham returned to inform Helen that William would be ready in a few minutes, Helen noticed that the butler kept quite still. To her perturbed, anxious mind this stillness appeared painfully ominous. Was he thinking of refusing to see her or forming some plan to defeat the purpose which brought her to his house? She decided to enlist Mrs. Shortham's sympathy on her behalf in the interview which Helen believed would be of vital consequence to her lover.

"I want William to do me a great favour." She spoke in short, anxious tones.

"Certainly, Miss, if it is in his power. It would be very hard of him to refuse you or your father's child."

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"But there is such ingratitude in the world, Mrs. Shortham, that one can never tell."

"Never fear, Miss, I'll be your friend if Shortham isn't. Leave him to me."

Helen could not help smiling at this exhibition of domestic supremacy and her heart went out to the humble woman who promised assistance at this painful period in her life.

"Hurry up, William. You have been serving gentlefolks and you know it is bad manners to keep a lady waiting." Mrs. Shortham shouted this ultimatum from the parlour door and a brisk movement beyond the partition followed by a creaking, dull thud told the anxious Helen that the butler had at last made up his mind to some course of action and was hastening to obey his spouse.

"Pardon, Miss, I didn't know it was you," said William apologetically as he came forward.

Mrs. Shortham raised her eyes slightly in sorrow at her husband's reckless disregard of truth.

"William," said Miss Fortescue, coming at once to the object of her visit. "I heard that you found a letter addressed to Dr. Mowbray which was to be opened in the event of Rial Greton's life being in danger. You had to give evidence against him, you gave it very honestly and truthfully as far as you saw of the events on that dreadful night, but now I ask you to get me that letter for the doctor, to whom it is addressed and who is the only person having any right to it."

Helen's voice rose to a command as she uttered the closing words of this request.

"Have you the letter?" broke in Mrs. Shortham imperatively.

"No," replied William, doubtfully.

"No," exclaimed Mrs. Shortham falling back a step or two to transfix William with a look of disappointment and distrust.

"I mean," explained the butler with an air of innocence, "I had some package which I understood was addressed to Dr. Mowbray but I don't know what happened to it. Besides I could not be expected to help a man against whom I appeared as witness. It isn't right to ask me. It is against nature." There was a sullen strain in this protest which threatened the ruin of Helen's hopes!

Mrs. Shortham looked at Helen with an intent face which seemed to show difficulty about securing the required favour under the circumstances.

"I told you," said Helen addressing her, "that this world is full of ingratitude." Helen saw the reluctance of the wife to assist against the husband and fearful of losing such a valuable ally she appealed to the sense which always excites a woman's sympathy. "Won't you help me to induce William to do me a favour?"

"William, tell Miss Fortescue where the letter is to be found and that will satisfy her," calmly suggested Mrs. Shortham.

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"Yes, indeed it will, and I shall be for ever thankful."

William looked at Helen, then looked at his wife and after a moment's steady contemplation, threw back his head on his shoulders and drew up his body as if to resist the combined attack now made upon him.

"Women cannot understand the affairs of men."

"What has that to do with this business?" replied Mrs. Shortham angrily.

The butler's head fell a little and his shoulders bent as he saw the storm brewing.

"A woman can understand when you tell her where a packet is and that is all she wants to know."

William saw how the battle was likely to shape itself and decided to detach his wife from the alliance with Helen. This good generalship would have succeeded but Helen resolved to intervene before the blow could be struck.

"You have some special object in refusing this information. I am sorry that I have stooped to ask a favour but it has at all events proved that Mrs. Shortham has a good heart, I have discovered that and I thank her for the kindness she has shown me."

In apparent indignation at her treatment Helen rose to leave, but Mrs. Shortham walked across her husband's bows casting a look of disdain at him for his conduct towards a lady and requested Helen to remain seated.

"Certainly, Mrs. Shortham. I cannot refuse what you ask."

This prompt compliance filled the old woman with pride that a lady had obeyed her with such alacrity.

"You should be ashamed to have your name mixed up with a murderer," remarked William with bitter emphasis when he found his wife making common cause with Helen.

The brutal words stung Helen to the quick. Her face flushed with fierce indignation and casting a reproving glance at the man who insulted her in his own house, she appealed to Mrs. Shortham for protection.

"How dare you, William, insult a lady in this house. It is unmanly. Withdraw and apologise or I shall give you no peace until you do. I am sorry, Miss Helen, for his language."

"It is the language of every evil-minded and foul-mouthed person in Bayview, but while my character is beyond reproach, while my honour is unstained, I care not for the carping tongues of the demons of malice and falsehood."

"They are not fit to clean your boots," added Mrs. Shortham whose feelings had risen while listening to Helen's eloquent defence.

"People never talk without reason," went on Shortham, doggedly persistent in his attitude.

"Do you believe all they say?" asked Helen.

"Not about you, miss, but there can be no doubt

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about my late master. The proofs were clear and you should leave the law to take its course. He was trying to marry the dead girl. What is it to you what happens to him? You should keep your self-respect and not associate your name with his when the world condemns his wickedness. It is not ingratitude to warn you, to save you from yourself."

"There is a lot in what William says," interposed Mrs. Shortham in a spirit of compromise.

Tears stood in Helen's eyes. The powerlessness of her position, the sense of a hopeless plight which few could understand and none could feel pity for, her loneliness, brought back much of the distress she had been suffering for weeks before. It was plain that the butler knew where the letter could be found, that it contained important information and that its recovery meant life or death for Rial. In such an extremity she would play her last card, fire the last shot in her effort to secure the packet.

"I have come here to beg for this letter because I love Rial Greton and want to save him," said Helen appealingly.

Mrs. Shortham opened her eyes in terror of a woman declaring her love for a man awaiting execution.

"Mercy, Miss Helen, you have lost your head."

"No, my dear Mrs. Shortham. I have not lost my head. I have lost my heart. I always loved Rial even when he jilted me, cruelly jilted me, to give his affections to Miss Busch, but my love never

wavered and now in his trouble I will make any sacrifice to help and save him."

Mrs. Shortham's feeling gradually changed to admiration of this beautiful young girl proving faithful in danger to the man who had wronged and deceived her.

"Won't you help me to save the man I love?" Helen appealed again with all the force of a heroine in distress to the man who had the power to succour.

"How can I?" argued William. "It is impossible to help when I have been the chief witness for his conviction."

"You have done your duty. I am not asking you to recall what you have done. I want the packet which was addressed to another. It may save Rial or it may not but your name will not be compromised in any way." Helen pressed hard, using all the artifices of her sex, all the eloquence of an earnest soul, to overcome the butler's refusal.

"William," said his wife in warning tones, "if Mr. Greton is executed, and he is innocent, his blood will be on our heads, and the heads of our family. Be careful not to bring this curse upon us. Don't be headstrong or anxious to have a man hanged. It is said those who have seen a man hanged never forget the sight."

This appeal moved William slightly. He acknowledged that he gave the packet to another, but it was a great secret and he could not tell the name of the person at any cost.

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"Can you not get it back?" suggested Helen and his wife together.

"Impossible," replied the butler. "The person in whose possession it is has concealed it carefully and would never give it up."

"Why?" asked Helen in amazement.

"Don't ask me," returned William, further mystifying the situation. "I am in her power—that person's power," he immediately added by way of correction. It had slipped from him in an unguarded moment that the custodian of the letter was a female.

William's indiscretion helped to break down his doggedness. What he was most anxious to guard against had happened, namely the acknowledgment that he had given the packet to a woman.

Helen looked significantly at Mrs. Shortham. "There is something in this. A woman has the letter."

"I am not the woman," replied the butler's wife, nettled by the suspicion in Helen's words.

"You do me an injustice if you think I suspected you. William has given the packet to a woman and he is in that woman's power. It sounds strange. As a wife you should insist upon an explanation."

"She understands already," explained William.

Mrs. Shortham looked puzzled and confused. Her intelligence was unable to grasp the full meaning of this situation. She did not understand as William had given her the credit of, but at the

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same time she did not wish to appear ignorant of her husband's affairs before Helen.

"Tell the woman's name and it will put an end to all doubt and misunderstanding."

Mrs. Shortham approved of this suggestion and appealed to William to help Helen as he knew where the letter was and put an end to suspense and uncertainty.

"Let her think of her greatest enemy." He wished to save his honour by the idea that he had not betrayed the name.

"How are you in her power?"

"I am in her employment.

"Then it must be Mrs. Hurst," guessed Helen, who was quite sure she had given the name of her greatest enemy.

"She has it, miss; quite right," said William, giving away the secret which he had determined to keep on entering the room, but which the tact and perseverance of one persistent and one sympathetic woman had dragged from him.

At the moment of this acknowledgment there was a hasty shuffle on the street outside the little window, which alarmed all within the room, and a man's footsteps were heard in quick succession making away from the butler's house.

"Somebody has been listening," said Helen with a frightened look.

"I fear so," replied the butler, very much frightened also.

CHAPTER XXVI

With joyous hope and light step Helen hastened to apprise Mowbray of the success of her visit and to urge him at once to ask Mrs. Hurst for the document.

She found the doctor awaiting her return. He was not aware whence she had gone and had begun to feel apprehensive, when almost breathless with exertion to reach home quickly she arrived looking brighter than usual.

"Don't you think it better to see Mrs. Hurst to-night and demand the packet? We cannot take any risks." Helen made this suggestion after relating all that had occurred at the house of the Shorthams.

"You are too impetuous," advised the doctor. "It would be unfair to the butler without his permission to demand delivery from Mrs. Hurst. She is a woman of strong nerve and determination. She would instantly dismiss him and either deny the existence of the packet or give some excuse for delay until her purpose has been effected.

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Let us proceed cautiously with such a woman. Her hatred of Rial Greton, her anxiety to see him destroyed, has such a hold of her being that malice will urge her to any act of injustice. It is unworthy conduct but it is her nature and she is as powerless to resist nature as grass to grow downwards.

"Perhaps you are right," sighed Helen who was impatient of delay and favourable to instant action. However, she had too much reason to be grateful to Mowbray to press him beyond what he deemed prudent and advisable.

"I will call on her early in the morning," he promised as he bade Helen good-night.

When he had reached his house, the doctor sat plunged in deep thought over the events of the day and some hours thus passed ere he rose to seek much-needed rest. He had gone half-way up the stairs towards his bedroom when a loud knock at the door stopped him, and turning back to open he found a messenger, who said hurriedly:—

"Mrs. Hurst's house has been broken into by robbers. She is dying. Come at once."

This short, sensational intelligence banished all desire for sleep from the doctor's eyes and coming so soon after Helen's impression that the conversation in the butler's house had been overheard, startled him considerably. Was it possible that another of whom they knew nothing was on the

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track of the packet? If so, Helen's instinct of quick action might prove they had lost an opportunity which could never be recalled. The doctor felt uneasy and remorseful as he proceeded to Mrs. Hurst's residence, his only hope being that the affair was an ordinary burglary and not one committed for the special purpose of stealing that letter which Helen had set her heart upon recovering for Rial's sake. Strangely enough, though called to attend Mrs. Hurst, he gave little thought to the part of the message which stated that she was dying. His whole attention was occupied with the question of the letter: whether it had been stolen; and if so, who might the person be so interested in its contents as to risk this criminal method of obtaining possession of it?

The rain had ceased and the moon shining in a mellow blue dome idealised the scene. The mountains seemed great fortifications built by Titans in a war with the gods and the distant waters belted with streaks of silver rippled and danced to unseen and mystic music. On such a night when peace and rapture should possess his soul the doctor walked on oblivious of the beauty of nature, heedless of a scene which the troubled mind might find ~~not~~ contemplating.

He found Mrs. Hurst stretched apparently lifeless on a richly upholstered couch with beautiful carvings at the back and sides. Around the room were signs of desperate struggle, light tables overturned and

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bric-à-brac tossed about recklessly, drawers in cabinets and desks burst open with ruthless force and their contents littered on the floor.

Mowbray raised the eyelids of the prostrate woman and felt her pulse and silently thanked Heaven that she was still living. He searched carefully for wounds on the body but found no trace of blood or any indication of serious mal-treatment which might cause internal hemorrhage. There were contused marks on the arms and neck as if she had been gripped violently, and the mouth was swelled and distorted, but beyond these injuries which were superficial he discovered no cause for alarm and concluded she had become unconscious from serious shock to the system. Having applied the usual remedies he awaited the result with confidence, and felt relieved when within half an hour, she opened her eyes and endeavoured to alter the position of her body. Shortly afterwards her strength reasserted itself to such an extent that though feeling much pain and still dazed she was able to give an account of what had taken place.

"You are aware, "she began feebly, "that my family is away from home at present. I returned alone for Rial Greton's trial as I felt a deep interest in the case and wished to be present during the court proceedings. I had only one servant in the house and she retired early to-night, leaving me to arrange some small matters which I expected would keep me up later than usual. Somewhere about

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half past eleven o'clock a sharp knock at the hall-door, which as you have seen is close at hand, rather startled me but I have a fairly good nerve and what might frighten other women only made me curious. I opened the door at once to find myself confronted by a man of small stature, good-looking, and with an agreeable smile, who said in bland tones that he wished to speak with me privately on a very urgent matter regarding the conviction of Rial Greton. I admitted him without further inquiry, being carried away by my feelings, of which you already know something.

The doctor nodded his head and remained silent.

"When the stranger came into this room he glanced sharply about him, a proceeding which I attributed to a desire to be certain a third party was not present, and then he informed me in whispers that a strong effort was being made to establish the innocence of the prisoner and that it was quite probable a desperate attempt would follow to secure a document which Edith Busch had written before her death and in which some particulars were expected to come to light exonerating Rial."

"Did he tell you by whom the effort was being made?" asked the doctor.

"No. I replied to the stranger's story by pointing out the absurdity of trying to upset the verdict of the jury, but he persisted in his view and hinted that he overheard people saying that I had the

document in my possession. I became confused and stammered out that people should mind their own business if they had any business to mind. My visitor appeared to take this as a personal offence and demanded an apology. I refused. 'If you don't give an apology you must give me the packet,' he cried with great vehemence and ferocity of manner. For the first time in my life I felt really terrified. 'The packet is in this room, madam, and I must have it with or without your consent before I leave.' I saw a fierce light, something we read about madmen in his eyes, and I moved to touch the bell, but he anticipated the move and gripping my arm with violence swore that if I stirred he would kill me. This so inflamed my passion, so stirred my blood, that measuring myself against his proportions I thought I should be able to grapple with him until I had aroused the servant."

"It was a daring resolve," said the doctor with some admiration of the woman's courage.

"It dawned upon me," she continued, "that he was an agent working on Rial Greton's behalf, and rather than be worsted by him I was prepared to sacrifice my life."

Such a pronouncement did not surprise the doctor as he knew already that she was the sworn and implacable enemy of the unfortunate inmate of Bayview prison.

"'You shall never have the letter, I hissed in

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his teeth. Then I called out for help at the top of my voice but he stifled the cry with his hand and we began to wrestle around the room as you can observe from the appearance of the place. Two or three times I had hopes of getting the better of him yet each time he saved himself with such ease that I could see he had been reserving his strength which proved to be the case, for before I could escape a clutch at my throat he had my head thrown back and a handkerchief tied over my mouth. I made frantic efforts to tear off the handkerchief but he bound my hands also and I lay helpless on a chair while he swiftly and deftly prised open the drawers and strewed their contents all over the room just as you see them now. It all happened within five minutes. I began to feel faint and for a moment lost consciousness but rallied again by a great effort of will to find my assailant pursuing his search with unabated zeal. A disappointed and baffled look began to show upon his face, causing him to cast very menacing and malicious glances towards me. I pretended to be indifferent. He moved in my direction as I thought to threaten me with heavy penalties if I did not surrender but he said nothing and stood watching my face intently. All at once he sprang towards a little casket which stood upon the cabinet and with a cry of joy seized the packet which I may now tell you, doctor, was addressed to you and which I meant to deliver into your hands this morning. I had

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given him the clue to the hiding-place. Had I not looked towards the object which contained the packet he could never have discovered it but the anxiety in my look betrayed the secret and helped his success. Without turning to speak a word he clasped the packet with feverish haste, buried it in his breast pocket and rushed out of the house. With difficulty I got upon my feet and stamped upon the floor in the hope of awakening the servant. The next thing I remember is to see you here."

"So the precious packet is gone," thought the doctor, who had been in hope during the early part of Mrs. Hurst's recital that she had kept it from the hands of the mysterious intruder.

Later the doctor learned what took place when the unknown thief left the premises. The man was congratulating himself upon the lucky chance which led to the discovery, when just as he gained the public road, two strong arms clasped tightly round his body and these words spoken with a strong voice in his ear:—

"I arrest you for a serious crime. Give up the property you have stolen from that house. If you resist I must use force."

The acting policeman was none other than our friend Harry Duncan. Harry had seen Helen passing to the house of the Shorthams and anxious for her safety, followed at a distance on the other side of the street. At a dark turn

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where he stood to look around he felt surprised to see that Helen was shadowed by another man, who kept stealthily but closely upon her track. Scenting danger and mystery in this proceeding he stood uncertain whether to warn Helen or not, but ultimately decided to follow in such a manner that he could at once rush to the rescue if she were attacked. When Helen knocked at and entered the butler's house Duncan guessed the purport of her visit and felt relieved. All his attention then became directed to the movements of the individual who had pursued her and who now approached on tip-toe to the little window of the house.

It was a long, patient wait but Harry never wearied, as the romance of the incident and the desire to befriend Helen, kept his instincts and mind in a tension of expectancy and watchfulness. He divined from the length of the interview that something of the highest importance was taking place but could not conceal his astonishment when the spy at the window hurriedly walked away as if afraid of discovery and apparently had no further purpose in watching Helen. It immediately occurred to Harry's mind to follow him and keeping well upon the stranger's heels walked by this street and that after the hurrying figure until at last he saw him pause before the house of Mrs. Hurst which he entered as already related.

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Duncan concluded that the butler had given information to Helen which this man was using to forestall her and that the haste shown had connection with the packet addressed to Dr. Mowbray. But he was surprised to see Mrs. Hurst admit the man. Were they in collusion he asked himself or was this fellow an agent of hers sent to watch the butler? Only one room on the ground floor was lighted and this Duncan noiselessly and cautiously approached. He could not hear the first words of the interview but he distinctly heard the demand for the letter, Mrs. Hurst's refusal, and the struggle which followed. At first he chivalrously thought of raising the alarm and forcing his way to Mrs. Hurst's assistance but the inadvisability of this course presented itself to his mind when he remembered that the best plan was to lay in wait for her assailant and wrest the letter from him. Whether the letter was stolen or not Duncan could then tell for a certainty where it might be found.

On closing with his man the desperate force with which he tried to wriggle out of Duncan's grasp told the latter that the daring thief had been successful. It meant determined business and Duncan putting forth all his strength, nerved by a sense of justice and a wish to earn the gratitude of Helen and the doctor, clenched his teeth in the resolve that he would possess the packet.

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The stranger, wiry and active beyond Duncan's expectations, made no reply to the demand for surrender, but bent forward with sudden force with the intention of throwing Duncan over his head, and might have succeeded but for the weight and agility of his antagonist.

"No tricks with me," shouted Duncan hoarsely as he caught a fierce hold of the other's neck with both hands and gradually squeezing with his thumb and fingers began to choke him steadily. When the venous blood purpled his face, and the man's limbs hung limp, Duncan with a swift movement brought his half-choked opponent to the ground and with one hand still on his neck, his knee upon the other's legs, tore open his waistcoat and pulled forth the packet for which there had been this extraordinary and mysterious competition. Having searched him for firearms or weapons of any kind and finding none Duncan rose smartly and left the motionless figure of his opponent lying prostrate on the ground.

CHAPTER XXVII

The quickness of the whole performance gave Duncan no time to discover the identity of the individual he had overcome. The possession of the packet being the all-important object he hastened off lest he might be arrested for robbery on the public highway and thus endanger the interests he was most anxious to serve.

Next morning Gabriel knew of the encounter and cursed himself for allowing Harry Duncan to escape. He remained long in sullen thought, his gravity turned to morose disgust at the troubles thickening about his head. Even Mrs. Mason began to appear odious in his sight because with her advent commenced the period of unrest and change which had robbed his life of the little sweetness possible in its bitter solitude.

Pondering over the stirring events of the few weeks past he regretted the mistake made by what he believed to have been a brilliant piece of dramatic justification at the time. He could have shown the Inspector of Police that Rial

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Greton was alive and at home while denying any knowledge of Duncan, and that would have frustrated what he now saw plainly was a smart device to separate himself and Rial. He could also have kept Duncan safely under lock and key in Bayview House and had he followed this course the game would still be in his own hands and not as he now feared in Mowbray's.

Had the packet been brought away from Mrs. Hurst as intended they could have destroyed it but now Gabriel and Mrs. Mason were in the dilemma that they could not know how far Edith had disclosed her history and if she had made a full confession the question would have to be decided quickly whether or not Bayview House was a safe place for two of its residents.

CHAPTER XXVIII

On the way home from Mrs. Hurst's Duncan intercepted the doctor to whom with feelings akin to those of boyish delight, he delivered the famous packet with a caution to guard it carefully; then changing his mind as if still afraid of attack from some unknown quarter he accompanied the doctor to the door of his house, telling on the way the full story of his adventure that night.

The doctor could scarcely believe that such luck and good fortune had at last favoured the friends of Rial Greton. He gave unstinted praise to Duncan's cleverness and pluck and candidly admitted that without his assistance neither Helen nor he could have succeeded. Harry made little of his work but felt pleased and flattered by the manner in which the doctor spoke of him. A word of gratefulness was higher remuneration to Harry Duncan than a purse of sovereigns.

With impatient haste the doctor ensconced himself in his study and having locked the door and

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barred the window opened the sealed package which was to disclose the story of Edith Busch's life. His fingers trembled slightly as he unwound the paper and found a card on which was written, "To my Dearest George." These words awakened all the slumbering emotions of his soul and brought back fresh to his memory, the rapturous thrill of the day when he and Edith vowed their love for each other. With heart full of sad regrets, of unavailing thoughts, he settled the pages before him and began to read:—

"Since I met you here I have been happy for the first time in my life. The little scream which first drew your attention in the strand was the admission of my heart that a strong true man had come into my life. To say I loved you from the moment our eyes met is but a weak expression of the power your presence established over my being, my thoughts and my will. I could not if I would escape from the prison in which Love bound me as your obedient slave. You shall never see these lines if I live but if I die I make the acknowledgment herein contained as the only solace in my power to bestow for the love you gave me. To be yours and yours only is the only ambition I hold; if not yours to be dead."

The doctor's eyes moistened and a strange pressure gripped his heart at this confession of faith and the prophecy which had been fulfilled.

"I am induced to write this because of a curious

premonition, probably inspired by my surroundings, that I am destined to perish before my time. Should such an end be mine, I am anxious to place in your possession facts which will help you to understand my reasons for not confiding in you at a time when a woman's dearest wish and interest dictated that she should open her secret thoughts to the man she loved. They will also help to save the innocent for whose destruction it is intended that I should be the unwilling but tempting bait.

"The shadow of the wreck in which my father and mother lost their lives, has pursued me through the intervening years, presaging as I have often felt a stormy life for the infant rescued from the jaws of death. At any rate my life has been an inward seething tumult of unsettled emotion and torment; a symbol of the tempest-tossed element which in its raging waters drowns alike the cry of supplication and despair. The frail bark of my soul has always been in peril, now fretted by the winds of passion, now torn by angry thoughts, now buffeted by the swelling waves of desire and sometimes swamped in the dismal blinding sea of abject misery. The calm came when you stretched forth your hand; a peace I had never known before stole over my senses, and hope for the first time filled my heart with dreams of a happy future."

"Poor child," murmured the doctor. "Her

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life seemed foredoomed to a tragic close." The tears came unbidden to his eyes and with difficulty he read on:—

"As a child I had no home, no mother; no tender loving hand to guide my youthful footsteps and point out the dangers on the journey of life.

"The brave old sailor, Seth Richards, my father's friend, who rescued me in his brawny arms, brought also to land a boy whose name afterwards became familiar in my ears as Bill Matthews. He was the only son of a passenger whom the crew suspected of escaping from justice under an assumed name. While still in my early girlhood, Bill who was a smart boy was put to business with a firm of merchants in a rather respectable position, and reports of his good conduct and rapid progress gratified the kind heart of his benefactor. My comely appearance as I grew up induced noble old Seth to tax his slender resources and deny himself many comforts in order to give me the education of a lady. He placed me in a boarding-school which had a good reputation, where it leaked out that I had pretensions which my origin did not justify and I learned early the bitterness and mortification of being daily snubbed and reminded of my inferiority. For Seth's sake I endured the torture patiently, but nothing galls the heart of a proud child so much as the idea that among her companions at school she is an outcast, merely tolerated by the

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rules of an establishment, to equality, but having no individual claim or right to the recognition.

“My years at school were years of sorrow, for my pride was constantly up in arms against the scorn visible in the curling lips and haughty looks, the well-bred indifference and the malicious sneers of my companions. To my sensitive nature the knowledge that mentally and physically I was far beyond their calibre only increased the pain I bore silently during all that miserable time. The feelings of resentment engendered by the thought that against such treatment there was no remedy but retreat, a withdrawal from the school, weakened those moral qualities which an education among my own class would have developed and strengthened. I do not blame Seth Richards. His intentions were excellent but the dark and not the sunny side of my nature gained mastery in my inclinations and though unconsciously I imbibed ideas of refinement and self-control, the main result did not produce the condition of mind which would compel me to obey rigidly the dictates of virtue and a good conscience. Whatever chance I had of becoming a lady, that is a woman of sweet and gentle disposition, of amiable regard for the feelings and shortcomings of others, of tastes cultivated to increase my own and the happiness of others, of manners unaffected, simple, lovable, of mind pure and exalted, was impaired by sending me to this particular school.

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“ At Seth’s dying request, Matthews assumed the position of guardian over my interests, but there was little to be administered in the way of estate, and his chief duty consisted in finding a suitable situation out of which I should be able to earn a respectable living. Our first meeting after some years’ separation impressed me unfavourably in his regard. He was about eight years my senior and had entered the years of early manhood at this time but he struck me as a common young man, lacking in character and personality, self-assertive to presumption and consequently pretentious in an ignorant way. His ideas and conversation were disagreeable, often objectionable, and his opinions inclining to the shady side of life were neither edifying nor instructive. However, as he appeared really interested in my welfare and desirous of discharging his trust for my benefit, I suppressed the instincts that warned me to avoid his society and endeavoured to think kindly of him.

“ A few weeks after I had left school he brought the pleasant news that he had secured me the appointment of confidential secretary to the principal of the firm in which he was himself engaged. I felt grateful. My duties were light but responsible and I enjoyed the pleasure of occupation. The frequent absence of Luke Aldworth, my principal, gave Matthews the opportunity of speaking with me frequently. At first I took no special notice of his words and manner but gradually it became

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apparent that he was endeavouring to engage my affections. The thought that he should dare act thus, disgusted and angered me, and I began to feel contempt for his conduct. To a certain extent I was in his power, for a word from him might throw me upon the mercy of the world and after considerable deliberation I saw no harm in retaining his favour by apparent encouragement of his kindness. He must have divined my thoughts, for his familiarity never exceeded the bounds of respect, and he took particular pains to study my tastes and wishes and convenience in all matters of our daily routine. Once I agreed after persistent requests to accompany him to the opera, where his knowledge of music and his efforts to entertain gave me great delight.

“ I found out that Luke Aldworth was not only head of the firm but the only working partner, and next to him Matthews alone knew the full position and dealings of the house. The business did not appear to be carried on extensively but there were occasional heavy financial transactions. Aldworth was a stout, short-necked man, who sometimes wore a harassed expression but his normal disposition was genial and cheerful and his rotund bald head and fat kindly presence seemed good nature personified. His easy gracious attitude and anxiety to cultivate my good-will and confidence gave the idea of a father helping his child to understand the intricacies and labyrinths of commercial affairs. He always solved a difficulty with patient explanation, in which

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the activity and subtlety of his mind surprised me, and his treatment of questions involving risk looked reckless till I understood that hesitation is a greater danger in speculation than definite and prompt action. Then I admired his methods and himself.

“When I had shown capacity to grasp details quickly Aldworth allowed me the unusual privilege of signing his name to all cheques issued by the firm. The responsibility weighed upon me for a time but as months passed by and everything went well, the fear of anything going amiss wore away and I found my prospects rapidly brightening.

“One morning I had reached the office a quarter of an hour in advance of the usual time when Mrs. Aldworth, at whose house I had been a welcome guest the week before, rushed into our private den and closing the door said, ‘Luke is dead!’ I felt a spasm of horror pass through me. I stood aghast, pale and trembling and unable to utter a word. ‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Aldworth to whose eyes copious tears started, ‘he died suddenly at six o’clock this morning.’ She tried to speak between her sobs. Before he died, she continued, ‘he had just time to gasp out that there were £10,000 to his credit but that his liabilities far exceeded that amount and when the report of his death got abroad creditors would immediately demand payment of their accounts. I saw ruin staring us in the face. “What shall I do?” I asked him in despair and with his last breath he advised me to find you early this

morning and get a cheque for £5000 which I could present at the bank and receive the money for before his death became generally known. It is the only thing that will save his family from utter want and destitution.' I heard this piteous tale with sorrow but I expostulated with Mrs. Aldworth that if anybody became aware I had signed a cheque in her husband's name after his death and for the purpose stated, it would be called fraud and forgery and I would make myself liable to arrest for a serious crime.

"She implored me for all the kindness shown by her husband not to be obdurate in the hour of distress. Nobody knew nor should anyone be likely to know the time at which the cheque was signed. She would keep her husband's death a secret till that afternoon and inquiries afterwards would not connect me in the least with the business. I felt under deep obligations to the dead man; he wished his wife to have this money; had he lived he could have drawn the amount; and the fact that I helped the widow in a few hours' deceit, and enabled her to obtain the money necessary to preserve her home, seemed of little consequence if the secret were well kept.

"I sat down and wrote the cheque for £5000 payable to bearer, which I handed to Mrs. Aldworth advising her to act promptly and make no mistake. As she left the office Matthews entered and shot a searching, questioning look in her direction.

CHAPTER XXIX

“‘What brought Mrs. Aldworth here this morning?’ Matthews asked later in the day. I had expected the question and was prepared with an answer.

“‘Mr. Aldworth is unwell, and she called to tell me he could not possibly attend to business to-day.’

“‘I should be sorry anything occurred, because he is getting on well. I called at the bankers yesterday and they informed me that there are £10,000 to credit, which is a splendid cash balance to work on.’

“My heart sank within me at this information, as it was certain to lead to inquiries about the sum of £5000—a much larger amount than Aldworth’s transactions warranted—being withdrawn one day in cash. About an hour afterwards a messenger arrived with a note for Matthews, from the manager of the bank stating he wished to see him, and Matthews left the office. Subsequently I learned that the manager drew

attention to the cheque, which had excited surprise, and in consequence of their interview Matthews proceeded straight to Aldworth's house, there to hear the further startling news that his employer was dead. Acting on his suspicions he returned to the office, sought me alone, and looking ominously grave made the accusation which I feared so much. I must have betrayed the secret in my face, for he took my silence as an acknowledgment of guilt and locking the door induced me after much persuasion and entreaty to confess what I had done. 'There shall be nothing said about this at present, but lest I may hereafter be suspected, if a document is signed admitting that you issued the cheque after Aldworth's death, I shall endeavour to protect you and explain the position of affairs to the creditors.' I strongly dissented from this proposal but on his threat to place the affair in the hands of the police I signed the following declaration:— 'I Edith Busch do hereby solemnly declare that the cheque for £5000 was signed by me in my employer's name at a time when I knew Luke Aldworth was dead.'

"I had acted on a generous impulse towards the widow and family of my benefactor, but now the folly of my act struck me with terror, intensified by the knowledge that I had placed myself entirely in the power of Matthews. He could at any time not only denounce me but prove

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I was a forger. A chill of fear ran through my body and a leer of triumph overspread the features of the man to whom I had thus bound myself. Youth and a trustful nature are poor equipments against the ingenious purposes of unscrupulous men. I found this out very quickly. Matthews' respect gave way to arrogance in his attitude and conduct. He claimed the right to walk out whenever he chose, to force his presence and conversation upon me, to say he admired and loved me, and that if I refused to marry him I should never marry another. I rebelled; entreated, even begged reprieve, but to no purpose; he persisted in the persecution and announced with hissing emphasis in my ear that he would watch my every movement and follow me everywhere until I consented to become his wife; that I should have to do his bidding and forget I had a will of my own. One foolish slip had made me the slave of a monster whose nature, cunning in weakness, had become ferocious in strength; he fawned upon the woman of honour and integrity; he lashed the forger without mercy.

"My life and prospects were blighted. The thought of forced association with Matthews, of tame submission to his caprices, of hearing my name spoken of as his intended wife, made living odious. There were moments when suicide seemed an easy form of escape from my mental tortures, but a gift of steadfastness in my nature

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enabled me to bear the struggle in the hope that some day relief would come. The morning of that day has not yet broken. I begin to despair of ever seeing it and my writing of this letter is evidence of that despair.

"Poor Aldworth was more involved in debt than anybody but himself knew. Demands poured in from creditors and inquiries brought out the truth, that the business was utterly insolvent; the assets could only discharge a miserable composition, and when the whole matter was wound up Matthews and I found ourselves without any occupation—both again wrecked—the fate of the first shadows upon our lives again pursuing us.

"We had been a month idle, when Matthews brought welcome news of a rich uncle of mine who lived in the country. How he found out this information I did not at the time stop to think. In fact Matthews had begun to be a mystery, and to a certain extent allowed me more freedom than when we worked together at Aldworth's. I had the hope we should drift apart, whatever happened afterwards, but now I can see he was merely maturing plans in which he meant to use his power over me for a nefarious enterprise. He said my uncle was a kind but eccentric man who lived a lonely life in a splendid house in Bayview and had no knowledge of my existence. As he knew my uncle he undertook to write on my behalf

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in the hope of moving him to invite me to his house. Innocently believing in Matthews' good intentions I agreed to the proposition and the reply came in due course directing me to come to Bayview, to stop at the Central Hotel, which was the principal hostelry in the town, large, well-kept and comfortable, and await further instructions as to the time when he should be willing and ready to receive me. The prospect of change, of seeing a near relation of whose existence I had been ignorant, and above all of escaping from Matthews, imbued me with a new sense of life and happiness. I could scarcely suppress the joy I felt. With a warning that I should be careful not to excite his jealousy my evil genius bade me good-bye, told me to be obedient to my uncle, and to keep secret my object in visiting Bayview.

Matthews suddenly disappeared without leaving any trace behind of his intentions or whereabouts. This event gave hope that I was done with him for some time though from his character I knew I would not be long free; and in a comparatively happy mood I set out upon my journey to the country. When I reached Bayview I followed the programme previously agreed upon, put up at the Central Hotel, and waited with some anxiety, but patiently for the communication which would give admission to my uncle's home.

"It was during this period of waiting that we met in the strand. How I dream of that day.

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I had entered a serene, a beautiful new world; the country with its fields and mountains brought balm to my wearied heart; I was far from the baneful influence of him who held a dread secret over my head; and above all I saw you. Dearest George, your first words, your kindness, the calm strength of dignified manhood, the freshness and frankness in your face—combined with a picture of health and vigour and manly confidence won my heart at sight. You remember that thrill when our eyes met—it was love's swift message from one soul to the other. The fragrance of that blissful moment has sweetened every hour of life since then.

“Our happiness, unfortunately, and all my bright hopes, were short-lived. The moment the veiled woman made her ominous appearance on the Strand, instinct warned me that Matthews was at work and the whole aspect of my visit underwent a complete change. I guessed I had been lured to this place for a purpose, and the uncertainty and mystery of my position alarmed me. You can now understand my appeal made with such haste and earnestness that we should part at once; it was not to get rid of your presence but to guard against consequences that might be fatal to you or I, if we aroused the jealous hatred of my tormentor.

“On my return from the beach a letter awaited me signed ‘Your Uncle,’ in which I was informed

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that a dance would be given in my honour and to be in readiness for the date named. It also contained a request to consider the communication strictly confidential. Knowing from Matthews the eccentric character of my uncle I took care to observe the injunction except in your case, in which I felt bound to apprise you of possible danger in displaying any attention to or regard for me during the evening.

"That night of the dance held for me the greatest surprise of my life.

"Gabriel met me alone at the door of Bayview House and when I alighted from the carriage sent specially to bring me from the hotel, the man whom I believed to be my uncle but whose weird appearance gave me a terrible shock, conducted me to an apartment in what he called the private side of the house.

"‘Uncle,’ I ventured to remark, ‘this is very lonely. It must be a dull life for you in this large building.’

"The man pretended not to hear and made no reply but pushed me forward rather roughly. If I knew we were alone and help distant I would have shrieked, but the knowledge that a dance was in progress and a number of guests in the house, allayed my fears. He took me to a small room which he said had been prepared for my reception, and before I had time to look round he turned the key in the lock and faced me.

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"This strange conduct on the part of a relative completely unnerved me. I lost all power of speech and shrank from him with a feeling of loathing and horror. The thought occurred that I was at the mercy of a madman, yet he had said nothing to justify that opinion and I was probably carried away by imaginary terrors.

"I shall never forget the look of fierce penetration which he fastened upon me when he locked the door. There was no admiration, no welcome, no tenderness, no kindness as I might have expected. It resembled the look of a snake, the brilliant, steely, searching, compelling look, which strikes terror to the heart of the weak and seemed to suggest that I was body and soul in his power.

"‘Your uncle.’ The words came like the hoarse chuckle of a fiend. There was such derision in them that they seemed to sting. My eyes dilated with dismay and a dizzy faintness crept over my whole frame. The idea of being in a dangerous trap shot across my mind in the confusion of emotions and fears that surged to my brain.

"‘I’m no uncle,’ he hissed. ‘But I know who you are. You are a forger, a fraud, a criminal. You dare come here pretending to be my niece.’

"This terrible accusation, the possession of my secret by this man, a stranger and a monster, fell upon me like a desperate blow crushing as it seemed the very life within me.

"I clutched the back of a large chair near which

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I stood and suddenly thinking if you were present, how you would avenge this insult, I braced myself to beard this ruffian in his den.

“‘You cruel coward to attack a woman in this manner,’ I gasped in trembling voice.

“‘Stop these silly taunts,’ he cried, ‘and hear me. Let us understand each other. I am the illegitimate son of your late employer Luke Aldworth. The sin of his youth has haunted him in my shape since the date of my birth. He wished to make me a useful, respected citizen, but the crooked, evil strain in my nature forbade the realization of this hope. Born under the ban of human and divine law, an outcast by fate, the offspring of polluted joy, I had no inclination towards good, no inducement to wipe out the stain and dishonour of my birth. My father trusted me but I robbed him and to bury that further shame I sought out my present means of livelihood here, so that I could live unseen and unknown by few. My life in this house has been a lie, the practice of acts in which I have no belief and the pretensions to virtues which I do not possess. I am a hypocrite, a knave at heart but in speech and conduct I enjoy the reputation of an ascetic whose aspirations and hopes are not of this world.

“‘Matthews told me of your beauty, he told me of your fall, and then we agreed upon the plan of bringing you to Bayview. The purpose of that

plan you shall know to-morrow but do not attempt to thwart us and make no move at your peril to leave this house without my permission. The owner of this house is a wealthy young idiot who is in love with you. Humour his fancy if you wish to be a friend of mine and express no surprise at the discovery you shall make when you enter the ballroom.'

"I had nearly recovered self-control during Gabriel's confession of shame, hypocrisy and deceit, but the menacing tones of his advice left little doubt he would proceed to the extreme measures of exposing my guilt if I disobeyed him and I made up my mind for the present to cultivate his friendship.

"He left me abruptly at the door of the ballroom. When I entered the bright scene and festive assembly quickly revived my spirits. Rial Greton, for I could not mistake his identity, immediately advanced with his inmost thoughts written on his face. I took his proffered arm and he led me towards a lady whose back was turned. 'Let me introduce you to Mrs. Mason.' Mrs. Mason wheeled slowly round and to my intense surprise, disgust, and dismay in which alarm mingled, there stood Matthews masquerading in woman's attire."

Mowbray reading in his study was no less surprised than Edith the night of the ball. That Mrs. Mason was a man had never entered his surmises and calculations and the discovery threw

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new light on the tragic circumstances of Edith Busch's death.

"At first," continued the narrative, "I thought I had been mistaken, but I could not be deceived about the peculiar shape of his eyes, small and shifty, and their look plainly admitted recognition but also enjoined secrecy and silence. I bowed to cover my alarm and Mrs. Mason passed quickly to another part of the room leaving Greton and myself together.

"My thoughts were far away from the rambling, frivolous and puerile conversation of my companion. Matthews in a responsible position as a lady in the house! What did it mean? The mystery and doubt considered with Gabriel's threats made me shudder at the idea that I had been forced into a terrible conspiracy for some fell purpose. I felt sick and worried while attempting to maintain an outward appearance of pleasure in Rial's company. Your presence, dearest George, and promise of protection nerved me to bear the dreadful ordeal with some composure, and the fact that I had a real friend to whom I could immediately appeal helped me to play my part with pretended indifference."

Vain regrets assailed Mowbray that she had not there and then opened her mind in confidence and taken the advice he would have given to flee from such a place and trust to his guiding hand and loving heart to see her safely through the perils that beset her path.

CHAPTER XXX

Impatient to reach the point which would elucidate the still shrouded mystery of the tragedy, the doctor after a few moments, silent contemplation resumed the reading of Edith's story :—

“ True to his promise, next day before Rial made his appearance which he did usually at an advanced hour in the forenoon, Gabriel requested my company in the same room as we had met the night before. Matthews, whom I will continue to call Mrs. Mason, immediately came on the scene.

“ ‘I think we have met before,’ she said with affected politeness.

“ My only reply was a look of supreme contempt.

“ ‘We have not met to exchange compliments,’ interrupted Gabriel. ‘We have more serious business to dispose of. Miss Busch, you are our colleague in misfortune, our equal if not superior in crime, and as we belong to a degenerate class necessity compels us to unite for our common good.’

“ I saw no use in opposing or contradicting

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Gabriel's assumptions and kept my mouth closed.

" 'Matthews, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Mason—this with sarcastic delicacy—has brought us together with admirable intentions,' and Gabriel chuckled at his own peculiar humour. 'Yes,' he went on, 'admirable indeed. A young fool wants a wife, we find a handsome woman of irresistible charms, we bring her beneath the same roof, a declared forger to ourselves, but an innocent, truthful, well-bred girl to everybody else, and we hold the trump card. Do you understand, Miss Edith Busch, late of Luke Aldworth's.'

"There was a nasty suggestion in the words which could not be mistaken. 'I understand your insults very plainly but I don't quite understand your proposition,' I said with as much pluck as I could put into the statement.

" 'I will make the proposition absolutely clear to your mind in a few words. Rial Greton is in love with you. He will make any sacrifice to obtain your hand. Mrs. Mason and I deserve to be amply rewarded for placing this grand opportunity in your way and we want when Greton proposes, that you consent only on condition that he settles £10,000 upon poor dear Mrs. Mason and myself who have served him with such fidelity.'

" 'Ridiculous,' I uttered in disgust at the monstrous nature of this proposal.

" 'Ridiculous,' he repeated coolly. 'Not at all,

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Miss Forger Busch. Don't hold your head so high in our company. We mean, but we are putting it gently, that you must get this money and get it in cash for your friend, Mrs. Mason and your humble servant Louis Gabriel.'

"The fellow was mocking me openly and defiantly.

"'What if I refuse?'

"'We don't admit the word in our vocabulary among conspirators and fellow-frauds. If you really refuse we must use compulsion. I should be sorry to put your tender frame to any suffering but I'm sure you will have sense enough to spare yourself and to spare us that unnecessary trouble."

"'How can I marry Rial Greton!' I asked in desperation, 'when Matthews wishes me to become his wife?'

"'You can settle that question between you at the proper time,' replied Gabriel.

"'You must leave him the moment the marriage is completed. I make that a condition,' said Mrs. Mason, 'which if not carried out will mean death,' and with this threat she produced a revolver to show that she was prepared to enforce her wishes.

"I felt in a desperate plight with those two scoundrels. They were trying to debase and dishonour me; to drag me to their own low and degraded level. The monstrous proposal coolly

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and callously set forth in his sneering way by Gabriel horrified me beyond description. It assumed that I was a lost being, without character, and beyond redemption. I decided on a bold course in my reply.

“‘I have been lured here on false pretences,’ I said. They laughed in derision. ‘I have been lured here for an abominable object, to marry a man I do not love and then rob and betray him. It is a vile proposal, one I would die rather than entertain.’

“They merely laughed again, in a loud, mirthless style like demons enjoying the contortions of their victim.

“‘Speak to her, Mrs. Mason, dear,’ and Gabriel left us together.

“‘Have you no shame, no heart, no feeling of a man?’ I cried as I faced my persecutor.

“‘Not so fast, Edith.’ I shuddered at his familiarity. ‘I have the grievance, not you. I warned you not to excite my jealousy. You disobeyed me. I discovered you making love to Dr. Mowbray on the strand.’

“‘You were there,’ I said astonished.

“‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘A voice cried within me to kill you both but I held back as it struck me it was only a chance meeting. If I believed now that you loved the doctor,’ here he played with the revolver, ‘I would shoot you on the spot. For the second time I say “beware.” I have to

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leave here for a few days very soon. Let me not catch you in the company of another or hear of it while I am absent. It is the last warning you will get.'

"I looked sharply at the desperate scoundrel and saw he was in deadly earnest. The appointment with you immediately occurred to me and I felt a blush not of shame but of hope. Matthews thought it was fear for he looked satisfied with the effect of his words upon me.

"'And now take my advice,' he said as he changed to a milder tone. 'This fellow Greton has more money than he can find use for. Gabriel is the son of your benefactor and I am your best friend. What we ask you to do is not morally worse than what you have done already. We want the money, we want to see life and have some pleasure out of it. Help us, do what we ask, and I guarantee that nobody shall ever know it.'

"'You have already betrayed the secret of the cheque. You would betray me again if it suited your purpose. I have no faith in your word and I refuse to be pushed into a criminal career because I acted foolishly to save another.'

"An ugly look spread over Matthews' face. 'You dare me?' he scowled. 'I could send you to penal servitude at this moment if I raised my hand for the police. Gabriel does not know the full particulars. Shall I tell him?'

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“‘Oh, spare me!’ I cried. ‘You are both cruel and stony-hearted,’ and tears came to relieve the burden of horror and sorrow weighing upon my heart.

“‘What shall I say to Gabriel?’

“‘Tell him,’ I said through my tears, for I wanted time to think, ‘that I am considering the matter and will give an answer when I have made up my mind.’”

“‘That is better.’ Matthews spoke as if now certain I meant to aid their design.

“The maddening torture of the nights I spend in this abode is unbearable. Horrible dreams assail me and sometimes, awakened by an unseen cause, I start up with cries and shrieks which I cannot suppress. The unpleasant, uncanny silence, the air of secrecy and stealth ever brooding over this household, fill my imagination with unspeakable terror. How shall I escape the snare; how can I prevent the crime they are hatching with such devilish ingenuity? These questions obtrude themselves night and day with hopeless persistence. While Matthews remains free I can feel no safety from his persecution fly where I may and any attempt to give information means certain death.

“The days wear on slowly, tediously, my spirits buoyed up solely by the hope of seeing you within the appointed time. Greton is hourly in my company. His changeful moods, his weakness,

his boyish fickle nature, steady only in repeated declarations of love, are a distraction which first annoyed and displeased but now interest me. My will, my sense of right, stand alone between him and wanton, irreparable wrong. If I were so base as to accept Gabriel's proposal Matthews would have no compunction in killing Rial, for he would never allow another the right even in name which he claims of being my husband when he wishes to force me into marriage. This poor prattling boy who, in lucid intervals, appears to be capable of better things if under proper influence, has no idea of the terrible precipice on the brink of which fate and criminal design have placed him. Whatever happens I have no intention of being the instrument to push him over. From the depths of my heart, with soul and conscience fully approving, I decide and let providence witness the vow—to die before I consent to their proposal.

"I have not seen Matthews for several days. His absence, of which I feel at last assured, affords the opportunity I have so long yearned for, of going to meet you. Rial has told me the shortest way to the Strand, a spot dear to my recollection, as the place where first we met and this afternoon I intend to elude Gabriel's vigilance and hear again the voice that has whispered secretly to my soul the sweet, endearing music of love and hope.

"We have met, the joy and happiness, the rarest

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ecstasy which a woman can enjoy, the love of an honest and manly heart are mine and I have pledged my affections in return, but I sit faint and trembling, a prey to fear which creeps upon me like a gaunt shadow, confusing my senses, terrifying my thoughts. All the bliss and delight, all the soul-stirring emotions of our happy moments to-day have brought misery if not ruin upon my head.

"I had intended to lay bare my secret history as set down in this paper and let you judge as you willed but the thought that you had won my heart as that of an innocent and honourable girl would not allow me to confess in your presence to the guilt of forgery even under circumstances which in a chivalrous spirit you might excuse. If you think I have treated you badly forgive the weakness of an erring but not heartless or ungrateful woman. Your love, short as its influence over my life has been, will sustain me in trial and danger—will sustain me in death itself.

"I have the courage to refer calmly to death for I write this letter with a sense of impending peril. Matthews' pretended departure was a device to test the effect of his jealous warning upon me. He was hiding in the strand to-day behind the wall near which we plighted our faith. He overheard our conversation or guessed its purport, for when he saw me in your embrace he stood erect for a moment to show that he was witness and the look of rage and revenge on his face caused me

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to swoon. I cannot shake off the deadly fear which his presence there instilled. Since my return I have seen nobody in the house and am hastily concluding this narrative lest some unforeseen event may prevent its delivery which I will entrust to the butler who has been very kind to me during my stay here.

“Whether by threats I shall be forced to undergo the mockery of marriage with Rial Greton or whether the plans of Gabriel and Matthews take a different course you will if it becomes necessary to hand you this letter be able to judge, and if it does reach your possession be kind enough to pity the hapless fate of one who loved you deeply and blesses your name with her last word.”

As he reached the pathetic close of this document, a great sorrow overcame the doctor, his eyes filled with the mist of deep emotions and choking sobs shook his muscular frame. He buried his face in his hands and gave way to feelings long pent up by doubt. Edith's name became dearer than ever when her life-story lay before him like an open book. Vain regrets could not recall the past but under her own hand he read her character; a sensitive high-souled girl in an evil hour had placed herself in the power of a callous ruffian and refused to speak at a time when a lover's devotion and protection could have saved her. She had done wrong, not for personal gain or benefit, not with criminal intent, and he could forgive the generous

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fault which prompted her to save others, but the cowardly advantage taken by Matthews to force her headlong into an abyss of degradation outraged every instinct of Mowbray's healthy mind and excited him to invoke stern justice against the real criminal.

He checked himself suddenly as he remembered that his first object should be to serve Rial Greton and not indulge feelings of revenge against Edith's aggressor. Her letter pointed plainly to Matthews as the man she dreaded, the man who had a motive of prime force in human relations, but the doctor saw that Edith's letter broke short at the point where particulars were most essential and another difficulty presented itself in the fact that, suppose he produced the statement to the authorities, who could prove that the communication was in Edith's handwriting? Even with the full facts leading up to the tragedy he was still far from proofs of Matthews' actual guilt and Rial's undoubted innocence.

Before the next day had well advanced a tragic event occurred which solved the whole mystery.

CHAPTER XXXI .

Three little boys were playing football with their caps rolled into a bundle outside the parish cemetery, playing with an energy and zest which they would never know in after life, and thoroughly enjoying the reckless hilarity of youthful contest when the report of a shot within the graveyard made them pause.

"What's that, Downey?" asked one of the youths, appealing to the leader of the little band.

"A shot," answered Downey who was as frightened as the others but felt bound to speak bravely.

Their eyes turned nervously towards the wall surrounding the cemetery, and presently a thin whiff of smoke rose from the corner near which the boys stood.

"Look in, Downey," requested the boy in whose estimation Downey was a hero.

"Faith, I won't," replied Downey very decisively.
"It's nothing to me."

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"Come over anyway to the wall," suggested the third boy.

They sauntered slowly and irregularly towards the spot, eyeing each other silently as they went, and fit subjects for panic if the least excuse offered.

"A ghost can't shoot?" said Downey, whose courage began to revive.

"I'll look in if you put me up," offered the smallest boy who had been easily beaten in the football tussle but had a good deal of moral pluck.

The other two raised him on their shoulders, and after considerable effort the little volunteer gained the top and peering anxiously here and there, suddenly let go his hold and dropped to the ground white and breathless.

"What have you seen?" asked Downey, terrified by the abrupt descent of his companion.

"There is a man," he gasped, "lying on his face on one of the graves and a revolver in his hand."

"Let us be off, lads," shouted Downey in consternation.

The boy who had looked in, scrambled quickly to his feet, and with one assent the three scampered off as fast as they could run. When they reached their houses they spread different and sensational versions of their adventure and the elder people becoming apprehensive hurried

to the cemetery to ascertain how far the boys' story was true.

The sexton was absent, but on search being made in the place indicated, the body of a man scarcely cold in death was found as described by the little boy, his head and face covered with blood and a revolver firmly clutched in his right hand. Several tried to identify the features but not one of the many who came rushing up could give the least information about him.

The police arrived early and took charge of the body.

"Whose grave is this?" asked the chief constable of a group looking on quietly, but morbidly alive to every minute detail of a strange scene.

"That's the grave of the woman murdered in Bayview House," replied three or four voices together.

"Does anybody recognise the corpse?"

There was no reply.

The chief constable gave directions to have the body removed to the little mortuary within the grounds and there under his superintendence one of the policemen searched the pockets and clothing of the deceased for some evidence of identification.

Mowbray had just concluded the reading for Helen Fortescue of the strange story of Edith Busch's life and they were about to discuss how far the facts disclosed would further their efforts

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on behalf of Rial Greton, when Duncan who had been at the cemetery announced that a stranger had committed suicide and the doctor was required to attend at once.

With apologies to Helen, who had begun to see light in the darkness that enveloped her life, Mowbray hastily set off, accompanied by Duncan. On the way the doctor briefly explained to the good friend by his side the story of the dead woman.

"Perhaps the deed in the cemetery will supply the missing link in the chain of romance and tragedy."

"Let us hope so," said the doctor thoughtfully.

A few minutes sufficed for the medical examination. The doctor certified that the deceased had shot himself through the mouth, the bullet entering the brain and death was instantaneous. When Mowbray learned that the dead man had been found on Edith's grave he suspected that Matthews had ended his life in tragic atonement of her murder, but though the doctor knew Mrs. Mason and had studied her features at the trial, he could not discover any resemblance between her and the corpse he had examined which would justify him in saying they were one and the same person.

"There will be no mystery this time," said Duncan to the doctor as they waited for the jury to assemble. "The police found in the

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possession of the deceased a letter addressed to the Coroner which will probably explain his reasons for committing suicide."

The contents of the letter, as read by the Coroner, ran as follows:—

"Before I die by my own hand as I am fully resolved upon doing I wish to make a public confession and reparation. There has never been an hour of my existence in which evil impulses have not predominated in my nature. Despite my best efforts I could not lead a good and useful life. I have tried to understand why I have always felt like a hopeless wreck drifting with every gust and wave of evil suggestion, but the more I pondered the less light could I throw upon that extraordinary problem. It could not be due to defective will or weakness of understanding for I have enjoyed ordinary health and my faculties were always clear and sound. Perhaps it is that my physical requirements working incessantly as by nature they must towards some object or desire, without a moral safeguard, led me on the easy road to evil deeds and cut off all chance of retreat from the fascinating allurements of wickedness. I cannot give any other explanation; I have drifted along a path of sin to which I see no more fitting end than self-destruction. It is fate; but the cause is crime. The fear of detection is before me and rather than live through further horrors I dare

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to face the unknown with the hope that some peace may visit my troubled, restless soul.

"I intend to die on the grave of Edith Busch. In extremity my thoughts turn to her resting-place as they turned to her beauty in the tide of its irresistible power. Let me confess to all men that I loved her with a fatal passion. Her objections, her contempt, her disgust of my presence had no weight against the overpowering emotions of my being. She should be mine. While her pride and honour like her virtue defied reproach she stood altogether beyond my reach. There was nothing common to our natures that could bind us together, but her momentary lapse, innocent of serious intent, gave the opportunity I sought to sap and destroy her moral strength. It was the work of a demon but to the pleasure of wrongdoing I added the zest of bringing Edith to my level and forcing her to acknowledge within her conscience that guilt had reversed our former relations towards each other. I was no longer a despised and hated suppliant for favour. She should now have to beg my good-will through life, my silence, my secrecy, and marry me when I chose or face the alternative of exposure and degradation. I had not reckoned what an indomitable spirit a woman can summon to her aid when prejudice and strong feeling urge her to avoid a particular man and must admit that my evil devices utterly failed against Edith's will and rectitude.

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"How quickly evil suggestion acts. Thrown out of employment by the insolvency of Aldworth's business, the outlook desperate, I had no settled course in view until one morning when Aldworth's son wrote to say that he wanted a lady housekeeper for a weak-minded young man to whom he was acting as tutor and who had an immense fortune. He asked me to find a handsome woman who would be likely to grant him a substantial matrimonial commission in the event of his securing her the situation and helping to arrange a subsequent marriage. I knew this hint gave only a slight indication of Gabriel's real intention. It was sufficient however to arouse all the latent forces of my brain in order to obtain a hand in such a splendid pie. In my reply I stated that an elderly lady of exceptional character and good testimonials would be willing to accept the position and that a young lady of rare charms would visit Bayview to see her uncle Gabriel. The necessary testimonials for a lady housekeeper of unimpeachable respectability having been forged to the complete satisfaction of Gabriel and Rial Greton, and I may add my own, Mrs. Mason duly arrived and became installed in Bayview House.

I had practised theatricals in an amateur company for three years, acting the female parts to such perfection that few even of my most intimate acquaintances could distinguish the difference between the imitation and the real character.

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A stranger who came behind the scenes on one occasion actually made love believing I was a girl. It struck me I could easily fill the place of a lady housekeeper in a family like Rial Greton's and at the same time penetrate the secret or the game which Gabriel had started. The moment I set foot in the house the wily tutor saw through my disguise but the cynical though not unkindly smile or its equivalent showed that he appreciated the cunning joke and that I might be a help to his design. At any rate when my formal interview with Greton had ended Gabriel greeted me warmly and enjoyed the humour of the situation which my presence as Mrs. Mason of aristocratic pretensions had caused him. I explained with particular care the facts connected with Edith's career down to the time when I represented Gabriel as her uncle and produced for his inspection and as corroboration of my statement the document in which she admitted the crime of forgery. I could not bear to lose sight of Edith; to induce her to Bayview I invented the story of the well-off uncle, knowing that Gabriel would retain her in his web if her presence could be useful. Before she entered the house Gabriel knew that Rial Greton loved her. How he discovered this was never revealed but it seemed to place the trump card in his hand, for the harsh method he adopted with Edith and the boldness, the brutality of his proposition, meant that unless she consented to his proposal

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to the cemetery to ascertain how far the boys' story was true.

The sexton was absent, but on search being made in the place indicated, the body of a man scarcely cold in death was found as described by the little boy, his head and face covered with blood and a revolver firmly clutched in his right hand. Several tried to identify the features but not one of the many who came rushing up could give the least information about him.

The police arrived early and took charge of the body.

"Whose grave is this?" asked the chief constable of a group looking on quietly, but morbidly alive to every minute detail of a strange scene.

"That's the grave of the woman murdered in Bayview House," replied three or four voices together.

"Does anybody recognise the corpse?"

There was no reply.

The chief constable gave directions to have the body removed to the little mortuary within the grounds and there under his superintendence one of the policemen searched the pockets and clothing of the deceased for some evidence of identification.

Mowbray had just concluded the reading for Helen Fortescue of the strange story of Edith Busch's life and they were about to discuss how far the facts disclosed would further their efforts

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on behalf of Rial Greton, when Duncan who had been at the cemetery announced that a stranger had committed suicide and the doctor was required to attend at once.

With apologies to Helen, who had begun to see light in the darkness that enveloped her life, Mowbray hastily set off, accompanied by Duncan. On the way the doctor briefly explained to the good friend by his side the story of the dead woman.

"Perhaps the deed in the cemetery will supply the missing link in the chain of romance and tragedy."

"Let us hope so," said the doctor thoughtfully.

A few minutes sufficed for the medical examination. The doctor certified that the deceased had shot himself through the mouth, the bullet entering the brain and death was instantaneous. When Mowbray learned that the dead man had been found on Edith's grave he suspected that Matthews had ended his life in tragic atonement of her murder, but though the doctor knew Mrs. Mason and had studied her features at the trial, he could not discover any resemblance between her and the corpse he had examined which would justify him in saying they were one and the same person.

"There will be no mystery this time," said Duncan to the doctor as they waited for the jury to assemble. "The police found in the

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possession of the deceased a letter addressed to the Coroner which will probably explain his reasons for committing suicide."

The contents of the letter, as read by the Coroner, ran as follows:—

"Before I die by my own hand as I am fully resolved upon doing I wish to make a public confession and reparation. There has never been an hour of my existence in which evil impulses have not predominated in my nature. Despite my best efforts I could not lead a good and useful life. I have tried to understand why I have always felt like a hopeless wreck drifting with every gust and wave of evil suggestion, but the more I pondered the less light could I throw upon that extraordinary problem. It could not be due to defective will or weakness of understanding for I have enjoyed ordinary health and my faculties were always clear and sound. Perhaps it is that my physical requirements working incessantly as by nature they must towards some object or desire, without a moral safeguard, led me on the easy road to evil deeds and cut off all chance of retreat from the fascinating allurements of wickedness. I cannot give any other explanation; I have drifted along a path of sin to which I see no more fitting end than self-destruction. It is fate; but the cause is crime. The fear of detection is before me and rather than live through further horrors I dare

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she could not marry Rial and if she refused he could denounce her as an adventuress. Edith's opposition which he had not calculated upon threatened to destroy his scheme but though I agreed to Gabriel's suggestion, so far as using Edith to secure the £10,000 stipulated upon, I admit now that had the marriage taken place I would have killed Rial Greton after the ceremony. The world was not large enough to contain Edith's husband while I lived.

"The idea that she loved another, though not justified by any outward evidence, had sown the seeds of terrible temptation in my breast. It urged me to lay traps, to follow her movements, to dog her footsteps. I was the veiled woman who surprised her in the Strand. It was the first time I heard of or saw her speaking to another man and it rose a fury of emotions within me; excited the deep and resentful feelings of jealous hate. I read her action as a declaration of war; a defiance of my earnest, desperate warnings. I decided nevertheless to have clearer proof. I laid the trap of pretended absence from Bayview and each day I watched the strand and saw the doctor regularly come there. Then I knew she loved him, knew her real disposition, felt the sting of her scorn, the bitterness of her betrayal, the fear that she might escape my vengeance, and I resolved to act promptly. When I saw what happened in the strand, when they met, declared

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their love, embraced and kissed each other, the demon of revenge became master of my heart. I hastened back to Bayview House, I hid myself from everybody, I loaded the revolver deliberately, the same revolver as I am about to use upon myself and waited. When we had all assembled in the room where the tragedy took place I pressed the electric button, putting out the light, ran close to Edith and fired straight at her, then dropped the revolver into Rial Greton's pocket and went back to restore the light. Greton feeling the revolver fall heavily into his pocket pulled it forth and holding it in his hand was thus seen by William Shortham the butler as described at the trial. Rial was so amazed and terrified he must have really thought that by some strange mischance he had killed Edith and when I accused him of murder he became almost petrified with horror. Gabriel shortly after knew that I had committed the crime but at the moment he believed my charge against Rial Greton had some foundation. It served the purpose of inducing our unfortunate employer to settle £500 a year upon us and we took him aside to sign the agreement, acknowledging that he committed the deed, and undertaking to pay the amount named during our lives. Gabriel invented the story of accident, which in the majority of cases would have passed muster with the public and police.

“I have told the truth to obtain the favour of a

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last request to be buried near Edith. There is a sense of calm in thinking we shall rest quietly side by side after a life of misery and regret and I feel drawn to this spot by the same influence that sends the mariner to harbour after a stormy passage at sea."

The letter was signed William Matthews and a postscript contained the admission that he was also known as Mrs. Mason during his sojourn in Bayview House.

In the circumstances the jury had little difficulty in arriving at their verdict as to the cause of death but they added a rider drawing attention to the statements of the deceased in which he exonerated Rial Greton from any knowledge of or participation in the terrible crime of which he had been convicted. The Coroner was directed to wire the full particulars to the Home Office, the jury hoping by this prompt action to secure the early release of an innocent man and to atone for the sorrow and suffering he had already endured.

On their way to apprise Helen of the extraordinary developments of that morning Duncan and the doctor, thankful that everything was now clear, dropped into a retrospective discussion in which both agreed that the man whom they could not account for and whose presence had been so disconcerting on many occasions was none other than Mrs. Mason who appeared in the double character of male and female as necessity arose.

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There was no doubt he had made the determined effort to secure the packet which Duncan had happily frustrated. They acknowledged the cleverness of Matthews' disguise as a woman for they never had the least suspicion till Edith's story disclosed the fact that Mrs. Mason was of a sex different from that to which she pretended to belong.

When the facts stated at the inquest were detailed to Helen she raised her eyes to Heaven and murmured, "At last," her lips moving for some time after in silent prayer. A serene look overspread her features and transformed them into a state of sweet and radiant happiness. "How can I ever repay the debt I owe to your devotion and sincerity?" She included Duncan in this expression of her thanks.

"I have only performed a duty to the woman who loved me," said the doctor. "You have performed it to the man you loved. Our interests were similar and success repays all our trouble. Would that it could restore Edith to me as it restores Rial to you," and the doctor in his triumph felt the blank in his life which could never be filled by another.

The release of the prisoner led to a great ovation in his honour.

From one extreme the feelings of the people passed to the other, in which they ~~endeavoured~~ by the intensity of their enthusiasm and regret to

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repair the gross injustice they had done to Rial Greton and Helen Fortescue.

It is some years since those events occurred in Bayview. They are half-forgotten by Rial Greton and his beloved wife, whose influence has made Rial a different man and whose treatment of her children promises to restore to the family the sound mental and bodily conditions which had been temporarily deranged by the mistaken notions of her mother-in-law.

Mrs. Hurst, unable to suppress her hate, fled the country to hide her chagrin and to escape the wrath of fierce public indignation aroused to a high pitch of feeling by the knowledge that she sought to work out her revenge by endeavouring to procure the disgraceful death of one innocent person and the ruin and dishonour of another.

In keeping with his temperament Louis Gabriel disappeared in some strange and unaccountable manner. Nobody saw him leave Bayview House or the town and whither he went was never known.

Dr. Mowbray attained to great eminence in his profession, being honoured by leaders of thought for his clever pathological work, but he still chose to remain an unassuming and earnest worker in the town of his adoption. Many tempting offers to change to a wider and more lucrative sphere of practice were held out from time to time but he

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steadily and persistently declined the most alluring prospects elsewhere, content to live on where he had first seen Edith Busch, wedded to her memory and still cherishing with constant faith his love for the lost but ever beautiful Vision of the Foam.

THE END





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